THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

THE MAN WHO DISCOVERED HIMSELF

BY

WILLIS GEORGE EMERSON
Author of "Buell Hampton," "The Treasure of Hidden Valley," etc.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. HUTCHINS

CHICAGO
FORBES & COMPANY
1919

PZ3
.E539
Ma

COPYRIGHT, 1919, BY
FORBES AND COMPANY

©CI.A529097

JUL -7 1919

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The Shoe-Pegger of Venice	9
II	Glimpses from the Past	22
III	The Lonely Breadwinner	37
IV	Tiger-Lilies and Cowslips	45
V	Down and Out	52
VI	Bernice Becomes Engaged	60
VII	The Calling Wilderness	67
VIII	Renunciation	75
IX	Departure	83
X	Toward the Land of Exile	92
XI	Miriam's Emancipation	100
XII	The Buzzards' Roost	109
XIII	In the Depths	119
XIV	A Youthful Optimist	128
XV	Rehabilitation	140
XVI	Rejuvenation	147
XVII	The Passing of Marsh Gordon	156
XVIII	The Parting	162
XIX	Paths That Met	169
XX	The Opening Way	179
XXI	Plans Ahead	186
XXII	Desert Combers	193

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXIII	Jim's First Deal	203
XXIV	Adios, Submarine	211
XXV	An Old Friend	219
XXVI	Turning Cattleman	226
XXVII	Stock-Taking	238
XXVIII	Love's Young Dream	247
XXIX	Bessie Speaks Her Mind	255
XXX	A Patron of Art	265
XXXI	The Great Round-Up	272
XXXII	In the City of Phoenix	281
XXXIII	The New Governor of Arizona	293
XXXIV	A Woman's Intuition	303
XXXV	Ned's Promotion	315
XXXVI	"She Never Could Understand"	324

THE MAN WHO DISCOVERED HIMSELF

CHAPTER I

THE SHOE-PEGGER OF VENICE

AWAY in the Far West it was evening — the evening of a lazy and balmy and sunshiny day. Out across the broad Pacific the sun, big, red and round and thickly shrouded with haze, hung near the horizon. Crimson and violet and softer opalescent tints played on the outer semi-circle of fleecy clouds, painting the sky with surpassing glory and loveliness. The white-sanded shore line of the ocean was peopled with many bathers. The inrolling wavelets with gentle swish were dreamily whispering their tales of mystery.

It was mid-May, and Venice-by-the-Sea was thronged with many visitors. The Speedway was crowded with gliding motor cars, every side street packed with other machines in waiting. Booths and shows and bazaars were doing a thriving business. Several little parties of friends were already turning their steps toward the Ship Hotel out on the pier, for it was nearing the dinner hour and the gentle sea breeze had given early zest to appetite. In the tiny plaza the great orchestra of fifty pieces was playing a selection from " Madame Butterfly." Just beyond, the clerks in

stores and mercantile establishments were busily finishing their day's work, keen for the evening's rest and recreation. And touching everything with its rich, ruddy radiance the mighty ball of the sun was sinking gradually and majestically toward the ocean sky line, yielding dominion for the night to the myriad lamps and Chinese lanterns that were already beginning to impart luminous tracery to domes and towers and the other bizarre architectural features of a transplanted Coney Island.

In the main thoroughfare a beautiful little girl of perhaps twelve or thirteen years, with bright blue eyes and a wealth of golden curls descending to her shoulders, came tripping merrily along the sidewalk, and turned into a large shoe store in whose windows was displayed footwear in bewildering variety of colors, patterns, and materials calculated to woo the pocketbooks of both the fanciful and utilitarian.

Little Bessie Gordon walked by the clerks, smiling and nodding to one and the other in a half-shy way, but hurried on and disappeared through a door in the rear of the store.

"Who is that sweet, lovely child?" inquired a lady customer.

The assistant in a half-smiling way replied: "The shoe-pegger's daughter."

"Oh," said the lady with mild surprise as she went on examining the dainty slippers that had been submitted for her approval. Her interest in the little damsel had evidently evaporated with the knowledge of her humble station.

In the little back room, Marsh Gordon, the cobbler,

was busily pounding away with his hammer as he resoled a tiny pair of well-worn shoes that might have been consigned to the discard by hands less skilled and resourceful. He was a tall man, with the stooping shoulders of his occupation. His figure was slim and lean almost to the point of emaciation — on the scales he would perhaps not have tipped a hundred pounds. But his head seemed out of proportion to his attenuated frame — it was big, high-domed, the expansive forehead fringed with scanty brown locks in which the pepper-gray was just beginning to show. The face was clean-shaven except for the upper lip, and from beneath heavy eyebrows the steel-blue eyes gleamed with almost preternatural brightness, showing that physical failure had not dimmed the fire of the soul within. Altogether an intellectual countenance, and, as is not infrequent in the shoe-making and shoe-mending trade, also a man of intellectual tastes, the observer might have added, as he ran an eye over the row of books on a narrow shelf behind the cobbler's bench, or glanced at the opened page of a volume on a reading stand close by, Prescott's " Conquest of Peru."

As he pegged with unseeing yet mathematical certitude the humble cobbler of Venice had his eyes on the printed page and his mind far away in the bygone days of the vanished Incas. The evening shadows were closing around him, but there was still just sufficient light for his task and for his reading.

An interruption came with the entrance of his baby daughter Bessie. In her hand was a little bunch of sweet-scented violets, which she eagerly presented to him.

"These are for you, dear daddy," said the child in a voice that vibrated with deep affection.

The shoe-pegger took the flowers between his waxed, blackened fingers, and into his cavernous eyes came the divine glow of fatherly love.

"And where did my sweet Bessie get the lovely violets?" he asked, sniffing their fragrance appreciatively as he beamed upon the child with his fatherly good nature.

"Out of our own garden," she answered proudly. "Our first spring violets. And oh, papa, you ought to see some other new blooms that are just opening out. They are the prettiest I ever did see in all my life. They had nothing at Wellesley or any other place in Massachusetts half as pretty as those flowers of ours."

"Well, I never was at Wellesley, you know, my dear, but I am willing to take your judgment, Bessie. Whatever you tell me I'm sure is right."

Bessie nodded her wise little head and shook her curls over her shoulders as much as to say: "You may well take my word on the violet question."

"So you think these flowers are the prettiest ever?" continued the father, smilingly, as he placed them on the reading stand.

"I'm positive. Besides they are our very own — out of our own garden, daddy."

"Perhaps that is just why they are so very, very beautiful, sweetheart," remarked the father, tenderly, as he drew the little maid to him and let his fingers wander affectionately among her rippling tresses; "because they are your very own flowers, Bessie, and be-

cause you are beginning to fall in love with California."

"Beginning!" exclaimed the child. "I fell in love with it the very day our train came down the San Bernardino Valley. And I loved it more still when I found you waiting for us here in Venice, with our pretty new home, and no more partings again, daddy, for mama, or sister, or you, or me, or any of us," she went on with delightful volubility and emphatic sincerity.

Bessie would have kissed her father, but he put her gently from him and turned his head away as, with finger tips raised to his lips, he gave utterance to a short, rasping cough.

"That bothersome cold," murmured Bessie, sympathetically.

"Oh, it will soon be gone," he replied with a touch of sadness in his tone and an enigmatic look in his eyes as he nodded to his little daughter. Then with an alert movement he went on in brighter tone: "But I must get through with this job, Bessie. You'll wait for me, won't you?"

He resumed his hammer, and the swift rhythmical pegging resounded once more through the room.

"Of course, daddy. I came here to bring you home. I just love the walk along the sea-front with you every evening. And it must be almost six o'clock now. Mama had started to get your supper ready before I left home. You know there is to be company tonight. Burn is coming — I mean Mr. Hopkins"— she corrected herself with a saucy little smile —" and Bernice is dolling herself up to beat the band. But why is it,

daddy, that you never come into the house when there's company? You miss all sorts of fun."

She waited for a reply. He hesitated for a moment before making answer.

"Because I like the open air, and the quietness of my screened room."

"Oh, it must be just lovely to sleep in the open air, I know," replied Bessie. "But you needn't be away in the backyard all the time, papa."

He paused in his work, and again coughed behind his hand.

"Your mother does not like my cough, Bessie dear, and Bernice also objects because of her friends. And quite right, too," he added, resolutely and resignedly. "No infirm person should allow himself to become a kill-joy, eh, little girl? Besides, I have my books, remember, and I'm never so happy as when I am reading."

"But it must be awfully miserable — all the time all alone," protested the child, with a dubious shake of her curly head.

The shoe-pegger resumed his task after a glance at the little wooden clock upon the wall. "Five minutes to six, Bessie," he said, "and I'll be through with this job on time."

The child no longer interrupted. Her glance wandered about the room. She counted the pairs of shoes already mended, ranged along a shelf, each with its identifying red tag-label. Then she looked a little resentfully at the big box containing a heaped-up assortment of more or less demoralized footwear awaiting repair. Next the volume on the reading stand inter-

ested her enough for her to bend forward and decipher the title on the opened page. After the all-round survey her eyes returned to the cobbler on the bench.

"My, how fast you peg," she murmured, as she watched the automatic, regular clap, clap, clap of the shoe hammer on the little wooden pegs deftly placed in position by the worker's left hand.

Just then the door was opened abruptly, and in walked one of the proprietors, saying:

"I say, Gordon, can you fix another pair of shoes tonight?"

He took no notice of Bessie, as the child sat in her corner with gathering brows and lips pressed tight in silent protest.

The cobbler stopped pegging, coughed apologetically behind his palm, then examined the latest pair of shoes that needed mending. His inspection completed, he said:

"Yes, Mr. Brown. But will after dinner do? I can come back, you know."

"They are wanted right away."

"Well, it's quite a job — half an hour at least."

"I'll find out. But I rather think you'll have to fix them now." And placing the shoes on a little table, he left the room to consult his customer.

When the door was again closed, Bessie's unvoiced protest changed to open resentment.

"What a shame!" she exclaimed, stamping her tiny foot. "And you so tired after your long day's work, daddy dear! I don't like that man at all. I don't think he's nice 'cause he don't talk nice to you. He's just a mean old boss."

"Hush, my dear," murmured her father, with a half-timorous glance in the direction of the doorway. "Besides, we must be considerate," he went on in soothing apology for the brusque words and manner of his employer. "Perhaps he is irritated about other things. We can never tell just what the reason is that impels to seeming harshness."

"Well, I hope they can wait until tomorrow for their tiresome old shoes," pouted the child. "I want you to come home with me. And mama made me promise I wouldn't wait one minute after six o'clock. She don't like me to be out after dark, you know, even with you, daddy, for she says the mists come up this time of the year and aren't good for little girls."

Gordon was busy again with his hammer, intent on completing the immediate task on hand. After a few taps, he stopped to inspect his work finally. Silence fell upon the room, broken only by the sounds outside.

"Oh, do you hear the car?" exclaimed little Bessie eagerly. "Swish! Bang! Gee! that's the scenic railway, daddy. I can hear it clear here. Goodness, how it rushes down one hill, then up another, then down again and round a corner. Such a lot of wonderful painted scenery! They call it 'A Trip through the Clouds.' You know I've been on it, papa, with Bernice and Burn."

"Is that so?" inquired the father, as he chalked the cost of the job upon one of the soles. "Twenty-five cents, I reckon," he murmured, bestowing a glance at the clock, the hands of which had now passed the appointed hour for Bessie's return home.

He rose, straightened out his bent form and placed

the shoes, after rubbing them with a cloth, at the end of the row of regenerated footwear. Then he looked down with a kindly smile at the little girl.

"And when did my bonnie Bessie go riding on the scenic railway cars? I did not know you had been venturing anything more formidable than the merry-go-round."

"Oh, Burn — I mean Mr. Hopkins — took us both for a trip through the clouds this afternoon. My, you should have heard Bernice scream. She held tight to Burn — closed on him like a clam."

The child was laughing now, her face lit up with the merriment of memory.

"This Mr. Hopkins must be a very nice man," remarked her father.

"He surely is," was her emphatic reply. "I like him awfully, and I feel certain he likes me, for he often brings me a box of candy."

"How could he help liking you, my dear?"

"Well, I don't care," continued the child, half pouting, and disregarding the compliment implied by her father's question. "When we got home Bernice was cross, and told me I had acted just like I was tagging along to get a ride. And I wasn't tagging at all. He asked me, and seemed pleased to have me too, for he took hold of my hand at the worst places. But I never screeched like Bernice, nor put my arms around his neck. I just pretended not to see her do it. Wasn't that right, daddy dear?"

"Quite right, sweetheart," was his reply as he nodded and smiled down knowingly at the child.

"My, but we must be getting home," exclaimed Bes-

sie, glancing at the clock, then jumping to her feet and shaking out the folds of her short skirt.

She had forgotten the proprietor, but at this very moment came a cruel reminder. The door half opened, and Mr. Brown's face was thrust in.

"I say, Gordon, you'll have to fix those shoes right away."

With this curt and unceremonious injunction the door was slammed shut again.

It was almost dark now. Marsh Gordon turned and switched on the electric light. An incandescent glowed forth from just above his cobbler's bench. He looked a trifle sheepishly at his little daughter. He noticed the proud, defiant anger on her face, as again she stamped her foot impatiently and indignantly. He was conscious that the child must be counting him a good deal of a slave.

"I wouldn't stay, papa," she exclaimed determinedly. "Your supper will be all spoiled. I 'spise that horrible man worse than ever."

Gordon laid a gentle hand on her heaving shoulders.

"Well, well, Bessie dear, it's all right. Work must always be attended to, my child. Some little boy has no shoes until he has these fixed, I expect, and so I'll hurry up and mend them, and then I'll come home. Tell your mama to put my supper out in my room. It won't matter if it's cold. Make her mind easy that I won't disturb her or Bernice and their friends. Now trot off, my dear little girl, or she'll be scolding you for having lingered."

While speaking he took the shoes to be repaired in

his hand, and again sat down on the leather-bottomed seat of the low-set bench.

"I know I must," replied Bessie regretfully, as she turned toward the side door. "But I'll beg hard to be allowed to come back for you in half-an-hour." She turned the handle and opened the door a few inches. "Oh, I'm not going to walk down through that cruel man's store. I'm just going out by this side door here — the way you come and go, papa. And when I get back I'll come in this way, too."

"No, no, dear. You must not come back tonight."

A damp misty gust of air swept into the little room. Gordon coughed; it was several moments before he could control the paroxysm. Bessie gazed at him pityingly.

"It's you who shouldn't be out in the night air," she said decisively. "Don't forget your top coat," she added, pointing at the garment in question hanging from a peg behind the door. "Well, goodby, daddy, for the present, in case I don't get back." And she reached up and patted his cheek with her plump little hand.

"All right, daughter. I'll work as fast as I can on those shoes, and will surely be home within an hour. Bye, bye, until I see you again."

"Bye, bye, papa dear."

The door closed. But suddenly it opened a few inches again, and Bessie's curly head popped through the narrow aperture.

"By the way, pop, I believe Bernice is head over ears in love with Burn — I mean Mr. Hopkins. When she

scolded me this evening I told her she could just have Burn Hopkins for her sweetheart if she wanted him, so long as I had you for mine."

And a merry little laugh floated back to him as the child again closed the door.

For a few moments Marsh Gordon stood still. There was a sad, wistful smile on his face, the glint of tears in his eyes as he softly murmured:

"Sweet, little dear! She at least loves her poor old father."

Then with a resolute effort emotion was put aside. Gordon laid hold of the shoes that had brought so much disappointment for Bessie — and for himself as well, for he dearly loved those evening walks home, holding the child's hand in his own, listening to her joyous and innocent prattle.

But he was the cobbler once again as he seated himself on his bench, and threw his knee strap over one of the shoes preparatory to putting on a half sole. Before he started work, however, he reached forth a hand, and closed the volume on the reading stand. That night the Incas had ceased to interest him.

Soon the swift, methodical rat, tat, tat, was once more resounding. Occasionally he would glance at the flowers which Bessie had brought him, and a smile would light up his haggard countenance.

"Yes," he murmured aloud, "a simple little bunch of violets can bring a gleam of sunshine into a workshop and a glow of pleasure to the heart even of an old shoe-pegger. So small a thing, perhaps, in itself, but what a miraculous transformation."

He hammered on and on. And now his eyes were half closed. He was not sleepy — just meditatively inclined — thinking over and passing in review the days of long ago.

CHAPTER II

GLIMPSES FROM THE PAST

LIFE is a long and slow journey, but memory can re-traverse its tracks with the swiftness of an aeroplane. During that half-hour of pegging and stitching the mind of Marsh Gordon surveyed the happenings of half a century. The thought had come to him that some big crisis was looming ahead — its indications as yet dark, mysterious, impalpable, yet none the less real, just like the vaguely felt oppressive atmospheric conditions that herald the thunderstorm. In preparing for possible events he was, so to speak, going through a process of mental stock-taking.

Fifty years old and twenty-five years married — this was the summary of his chronological record. Both anniversaries, that of the half-century and that of the quarter-century, would fall due in a few weeks' time. They were more than milestones; they were monuments that bade the traveller pause and ponder and cast an eye back along the road by which they had been attained.

And Marsh Gordon's contemplative gaze this night reached far away to boyhood days on the little farm in southwest Iowa where he had been born and reared. An only child, he had been early thrown into the companionship of books, and had acquired the habit of omnivorous reading that had remained with him all through subsequent years. The paternal homestead of

forty acres was located a few miles away from the county town of Creston, and it was here the boy had been educated, riding to and from school on a little pony, in all weathers, even when the rain poured down or the snow lay thick upon the ground.

Just across from the high school building was a little church which his people had attended for many years, and Marsh was brought up under their God-fearing Christian faith. "Most certainly," he now mused to himself, "it was the right life, and those old teachings cling to me yet; indeed, if we destroy a belief in the Bible or its teachings we destroy the dynamics of progress and the genius of home, our very civilization itself."

Those were days of ruddy health and splendid character-building, and when Marsh left the farm for the lure of town life he was a stalwart young fellow, vigorous in mind and body, straight as a gun barrel, close on five feet eleven in his socks, square shouldered, muscled like an athlete. Added to these physical assets were the not-to-be despised attractions of rosy cheeks, clear steel-blue eyes, and a crown of curly fair hair. Yes, in those days Marsh Gordon had been a handsome chap; Creston society had proclaimed the fact, and Marsh himself, without setting undue store on good looks, had enjoyed the satisfaction of being appreciated.

In his ruminations the shoe-pegger of Venice had recalled this youthful picture, not without a heart pang when he contrasted it now with his bent shoulders and emaciated frame. But he kept wielding his hammer, clap, clap, clap, as his mind roamed along.

Marsh Gordon, come to town to earn his own livelihood and carve out a career for himself, took the first job that fell to his hand. He was offered a salesman's position in the big shoe store of Keith and Sons, and accepted it at a weekly stipend that was small yet looked pretty good to the country youth who was well contented, for a beginning, to be able to pay board and lodging bill. The daily routine of his work brought him into acquaintanceship with almost everyone worth knowing in Creston, and his bright smile, genial manners and invariable willingness to oblige speedily turned acquaintances into friends. His popularity was increased by the fact that he possessed, not only a fine tenor voice, but the natural gift of singing, so that no church musical affair, or evening party of the young social set came to be complete without his presence, no town concert possible without his name being on the program.

"Changed days," murmured the cobbler, as he paused in his work to repress a fit of coughing. "I hardly think I could raise a whistle now," he added with a grimly humorous smile, as he reached for a waxed end already bristled and proceeded to sew up a small rent in the shoe he had just re-soled.

But after the first stitch or two he paused awhile. Yes, it was undoubtedly his singing abilities that had won for him the hand of the fair Miriam Rex, the acknowledged belle of Creston in those days. It was not his voice that had attracted her — Marsh had soon come to know that Miriam, although highly accomplished in other ways, had not one note of music in her soul, that music bored her, that she was incapable even

of humming a simple tune correctly. Painting was in her line, and for this she possessed undoubted talent.

However there is a natural attraction between votaries of art even although they may follow different paths, and Marsh, while most sincere in his admiration of Miriam's paintings, was just as incapable of executing these as was she of playing his accompaniments at the piano. Miriam might not have cared for his singing, but she certainly appreciated the applause, popularity, and social distinction it won for him. She was a truly beautiful girl, tall and willowy, with large, languid black eyes, a wealth of deep brown tresses, the complexion of a pink rose, teeth of perfect regularity and pearly whiteness, her manner full of repose yet capable of vivacity when the mood stirred.

"Gee! what a prize for an humble clerk in a shoe store!" mused Gordon as he recalled this vision of youthful loveliness. "And even today she is hardly changed a bit. While look at me!" He coughed again, as he ruefully surveyed the wax-blackened palms of his long, lean hands.

Yes, Marsh had won the prize from many rivals, for Miriam, besides possessing rare physical and intellectual charms, was the daughter of a banker reputed to be among Creston's richest citizens. On young Gordon's side were health, tolerably good looks, high hopes and a happy disposition, popularity, the future rewards that such qualities might bring — but meanwhile only the meagre salary of a clerk in a store. No doubt he was the destined heir of his father's farm and well-stocked acres, but that hardly counted, for Miriam made no effort to conceal how thoroughly she despised

country life and country people. However, it was a real love match; in those warm, young days of impassioned love-making there was no thought of counting this or that; and amid the acclamations of the population at large, if with no great approval from Miriam's parents, the young people were duly wedded.

Oh, the happiness of those early married days! Young Gordon had by this time completed five years of service at the shoe store. His salary had been gradually raised by annual increments, but was still a very modest one indeed. Yet, by living a careful and steady life, he had succeeded in saving between two and three hundred dollars, and this sum now became available as first payment for the purchase of a pretty, rose-embowered cottage, the subsequent payments to be made in the form of rent spread over a period of years. So the young people had entered proudly into the occupancy of "their own home."

Miriam had cheerfully decided to do her housework, but from the first she found her husband a willing, or rather an insistent helper. Before he set forth in the morning for the day's duties he had always done the main share in preparing the breakfast and tidying up the little home. In the evening he would never submit to Miriam washing the dishes; that was his job, he gaily declared, so he annexed it, at first despite her protests but eventually as the accepted order of things.

For in the second year of their married life a baby daughter had arrived upon the scene, and after a somewhat prolonged convalescence the young mother found her hands filled with multifarious new duties. In Miriam the maternal instinct was strong, and she lav-

ished most devoted attentions on her child. And in these days there had come to Marsh Gordon just the first touch of the loneliness that so grievously oppressed him now.

Within a year after the birth of Bernice, as the child was named, Miriam's father died. By his death a financial bubble was pricked — the supposedly rich banker left nothing behind him; indeed his estate was badly in debt and a crowd of creditors was left sincerely to mourn his demise. Without consideration of financial consequences, Marsh offered a home to his mother-in-law. The offer was somewhat condescendingly accepted, and the bread-winner found himself not only still more alone in his own home but also confronted with the urgent necessity of increasing his weekly earnings.

It had been far from Marsh Gordon's thoughts that he should permanently, or indeed for long, remain an humble and poorly paid clerk in a shoe store. But man proposes while Fate disposes. He seemed to have dropped into a truly deadly routine from which circumstances now rendered it impossible to extricate himself. In the ardor of youth, and with the zealous thought of mastering every department of the shoe trade, he had spent many an off hour in the cobbler's stall at the rear of the store, and had tried his prentice hand in the art of repairing. Apt and determined to learn, after a year or so he found himself able to correct up a pair of shoes or put on a half sole or straighten the heel just as quickly and efficiently as the regular cobbler himself.

With a view to putting this acquired skill to practical

account he now volunteered for work at night in the cobbler's stall, and, with heavy accumulations of repairs on hand, his employers were only too glad to accept this additional service. So, unbeknown to all friends except his womenfolk at home, Marsh Gordon became a professional shoe-pegger, bending over his bench often until the small hours of the morning and thereby putting a few extra dollars each week into his pay envelope.

Yet even with these prolonged hours of toil he had never relaxed in his domestic helpfulness, and at home his self-assumed tasks were accepted now with complete complacency that was no doubt partly due to the presence of his mother-in-law in the family circle.

He noticed, too, another subtle change in his wife Miriam. At the outset she had gladly accepted the responsibilities of motherhood. But, having suffered not a little over the birth of her first child, she now announced a firm determination that other children should come only when there was adequate assurance of their comfortable maintenance. Marsh toiled on, early and late, only dully conscious of the growing estrangement of the wife he had so devotedly, and still so devotedly, loved, and for whom he had made, and was still ready to make, unbounded sacrifices.

It was only after an interval of ten years that a second baby, another girl, somewhat unexpectedly put in an appearance. Miriam, although at first bitterly resentful against her husband's indiscretion and improvidence, at last accepted the situation with due

resignation. Two years previously her mother had died, but the new baby served to commemorate her memory, being christened after her, Elizabeth, a name that was subsequently dropped for its less austere equivalent, Bessie.

For Marsh at all events the baby was a ray of sunshine in the home. He loved to fondle and caress the tiny form. But this pleasure had to be surreptitiously indulged in, for long hours at night, stooping over his cobbling work, had caused him to develop a sort of chronic cold — a hard, racking cough that had caused the solicitous mother to drop more or less veiled hints about threatened tuberculosis. On one occasion, indeed, when snatching the baby from his arms, she had reminded him that both his parents had shown unmistakable signs of weak lungs, and had declared that *her* children at all events must be safeguarded from infection.

It had all been a terrible shock to Marsh Gordon. But he had borne it uncomplainingly — had accepted his cough and his bent shoulders and his loss of flesh as the price to be paid for the responsibilities of matrimony and paternity which he had willingly assumed. He was now further than ever from advancement or emancipation. He seemed to have become a regular fixture in the shoe store, during the day behind the counter, through long night hours in the cobbler's stall. All ambitions, all hopes, sacrificed to the dull unceasing grind of urgent necessity! The tragedy of many other lives besides his own!

Thus four or five more years had dragged their slow length along. Instead of any words of grat-

itude on Miriam's part there were only pointed little reminders — cruel reminders — how sorrily Marsh had failed to realize the expectations that had been formed of him. Remarks were made how the early friends of his youth had nearly all succeeded in life — one was a prosperous lawyer, another a rich contractor, a third a widely famous business man away in New York, and so on down the line. And the bitter suggestion was left that Miriam, had she so chosen, could have married any one of them in preference to the shoe-clerk and shoe-pegger with whom unkind destiny had mated her.

Those friends and rivals of early days had thrived and accumulated wealth, while he, Marsh Gordon, had simply drudged and grown old till now he was incapable of any new effort. But at this very thought the flickering spirit within him rose and asserted itself. "No, no," he murmured to himself fervently. "I know it is true that flowers perish, the rose withers, the perfume fades into imperceptible odor, and likewise I am afraid love loses its youthful fire. The keenness and zest of things become less compelling. But I refuse to believe that the world is less beautiful, because if I did I would know in truth that I am growing old. I don't want to grow old. I have so many things to do and as yet, seemingly, I have done nothing. But I will," he fairly shouted to himself as he brought the hammer down with a final resounding thump on the sole of the shoe he was repairing. His face flushed for an instant and a spark of the divine flame seemed to snap from his eyes.

He paused awhile in his task, then, recovering from

his momentary ebullition of passionate emotion, resumed the even tenor of his work and of his meditations. He was doing a little stitching now. It needed care, and his mind recovered the thread of placid reminiscence.

Miriam's hard words had been put out of mind, or, if they recurred, as was the case from time to time, they were ignored. Marsh was still devoted to his wife and to his children — still capable of further sacrifices. When Bernice was sixteen years of age, and the question of ways and means for completing her education in accordance with Miriam's high standards came to be discussed, a proposition had been made which, although it had at first startled him, came to be accepted by the doting father and husband as a right and proper solution of the difficulty.

The little home, now fully paid for, was sold at a sacrifice, and on the proceeds Miriam departed for Massachusetts, where it had been decided that Bernice should take up a four years' course at Wellesley College, while Bessie should enter a preparatory school. Meanwhile Marsh would hold on to his job and find quarters in a cheap boarding-house, or, as Miriam considerately suggested, it might be better for him to go west in quest of a warmer and drier climate where there might be the chance of fighting the disease to which he had fallen a victim.

But for the next three years Marsh Gordon had remained in Creston, sticking to his job, working as assiduously as ever, and remitting east all his superfluous earnings. For Miriam had written that she

herself was now taking art lessons, specializing in the painting of porcelain. To Marsh it seemed right and wise; Miriam had justified the heavy expenditure on the ground that in all probability she might have to earn the wherewithal to complete little Bessie's education and give her, like her elder sister, a fair start in life. Miriam was always right — far-sighted and right. Marsh had long since schooled himself to think submissively with her mind, and to him came no disturbing reflections of undue neglect of himself or disproportionate solicitude for others.

Three years of separation had passed; then Marsh Gordon's father, a widower by this time, had died, and the son had found himself in possession of the family farmhouse and acres. For a day or two Marsh hesitated — he had serious thoughts of retiring to the country and taking up the occupation of farming. But there were a number of deterring arguments — enfeebled and emaciated now, he was hardly strong enough for the work; then again, Miriam had despised farming, and all through her married life had turned the coldest of cold shoulders toward his parents and other relatives, uncles and cousins, engaged in rustic pursuits; and finally, in her recent letters she had been deploring the want of a few hundred extra dollars in a lump sum that would make all the difference for Bernice in her final year at college.

Marsh Gordon was still apologetic for his seeming failure in life — still eager to make all possible amends to those near and dear to him. So after mature reflection he decided to sell the farm he had

so timeously inherited. It realized $5,000, just $125 per acre, although the lawyer friend who put through the deal had insisted that the land was worth fully $200 per acre. However, the purchaser, already a big land-holder in the same neighborhood, was one of those close-fisted individuals who know that a good time to buy is when the other party requires to sell. So the transaction had gone through, and Miriam signed the deed that was sent to her, receiving soon after the $500 that would relieve her immediate necessities. The balance of $4,500 was banked in the joint names of husband and wife.

Marsh Gordon now felt that the last stakes holding him to Creston and to Iowa had been pulled up and thrown aside. He gave up his position in the shoe store, and could hardly blind himself to the fact that his resignation had been willingly accepted. There is little desire to have consumptives around any place of business — such had been his sad reflection. So now he moved away to California, hoping almost against hope that its much lauded climate might check the ravages of the disease to which, in accordance with doctors' dictum, he now acknowledged himself to be a victim.

There was one special possession, all his very own he counted it, which he carried away with him. From the very date of his marriage Marsh had made a secret resolve that he would save and secretly retain a sum of ten cents each day. He had cheerfully surrendered all the rest of his earnings for the common good of the home. But he had clung tenaciously to this slowly but steadily growing hoard, not from any

selfish motive, but at first with the quiet thought that it might come in very usefully in some emergency, then latterly from mere force of habit and ingrained determination never to touch the money unless it should become a question of life or death to do so. Accordingly, when he had left for California he had carried with him in his trunk sundry little money bags whose contents aggregated in value over $800 — all in silver dimes, for a sort of superstition made him hold to the actual coins accumulated.

He stopped for a few days in Los Angeles, and, finding the country to be fairly interlaced with suburban car lines, was enabled to visit a score of towns and little villages scattered around in every direction. But what especially attracted him was the ocean. Having been born and raised in the interior, this new sight of a vast expanse of water proved for him a perpetual charm. He would sit for hours on the seashore, gazing far out over the blue deep and watching the incoming tide. And from among all the beach towns he fastened on Venice-by-the-Sea as likely to prove the most attractive, it being a centre of bright life and gaiety, yet with quiet, pretty homes a few blocks back from the fashionable parade on the ocean front. For Miriam had promised to join him in California after Bernice's graduation.

That time had now come; wife and daughters were installed in the dainty little bungalow in which the family fund was invested; Miriam, Bernice, and Bessie had found many congenial friends; and here was Marsh Gordon once more cobbling shoes as the only

THE COBBLER'S INSPIRATION

available means, search how he might, of earning a maintenance for those dependent on him.

At this last thought he began humming in a low tone the refrain of an old revival hymn wafted back on the wings of memory from earliest childhood days:

On the other side of Jordan,
In the sweet fields of Eden,
Where the tree of life is blooming,
There is rest for me.

He dropped his hands on the lap of his leather apron. He was recalling the lusty joy with which the congregation in the old home church had shouted out this hymn, making the very roof reverberate their perfervid belief in a glorious future emancipation from all earthly woes and tribulations. But for him the words and tune echoed now, not with joy — just with weary, saddened resignation.

"Are those shoes ready yet?"

It was the voice of his employer that had broken into his reveries.

"I think so," replied the shoe-pegger. For a moment he was confused and not quite sure, for he had been working almost mechanically while his mind had been far away.

Yes; the shoes were quite finished, the last peg had been driven, the little tear neatly sewn, even the blacking brush used and a bright polish given to the leather.

"You haven't marked the price on them."

"It is a forty cent job, Mr. Brown," replied the

cobbler, with a glance at the clock as he coughed apologetically behind his hand.

"Give me the chalk," said the owner of the store. "Sixty-five cents," he added decisively, as he chalked the figures on one of the soles. "This is overtime work. We can't keep the store open after hours for nothing."

Gordon coughed again, but ventured no reply. He knew that there was no overtime pay coming his way.

"All right, Gordon. Good night. You'll lock the side door as usual."

The mended shoes were carried away, and the shoe-pegger was alone. He arose from his cobbler's bench, straightened himself painfully, laid away his tools, and removed his apron. Then he reached for his overcoat hanging against the door. It was a thin and threadbare garment, pathetically in keeping with his gaunt face and lean frame. He opened the door. A swirl of mist blew in, and he coughed a little. The swish of the waves on the not far distant beach could be heard.

"She didn't allow Bessie to come back," he murmured. "Quite right. The night is cold and clammy."

Then he turned off the light, locked the door behind him, and disappeared into the woolly billow of fog that filled the little courtyard.

CHAPTER III

THE LONELY BREADWINNER

BURN HOPKINS, who had recently entered on the practice of law in Los Angeles, was the son of rich parents in the East and a graduate of Harvard University. He had had a sister at Wellesley College of the same year as Bernice Gordon and in this way, when attending some class festivity, had made the acquaintance of Bernice and her mother. Their intention of coming to California had been duly intimated to him, and in point of fact, while Marsh Gordon was indulging the dream that it was Miriam's kindness of heart for himself, her sick husband, that had brought about the family reunion in the Far West, the real magnet of attraction had been Burn Hopkins, whose love and admiration for Bernice were unmistakable and whose eligibility as a son-in-law was in Miriam's eyes indubitable.

On arriving in California Miriam had been somewhat taken aback by the fact that Marsh had resumed his old calling of a shoe-pegger. She herself was now a painter on china, of undoubted skill and with at least a possible commercial demand for her artistic productions.

Bernice was a beautiful and accomplished young woman, a college graduate, bright, clever, and vivacious, and although possessing no marked proclivities

along any particular line of endeavor, such as painting or music, she was a girl capable of taking a place of distinction in the highest society.

Little Bessie, while also inheriting the physical charms of her mother, showed the father's strain in her blood by her love of music. Already at twelve years of age she was almost a virtuoso on the piano, and she also sang in a sweet, childish voice that not only gave promise of rich development but also showed the true feeling that betokened the real artistic soul. Although Marsh Gordon had long since ceased from vocal efforts, he too had the soul of music in him, and it was this kindred spirit that undoubtedly directed the affections of the little girl so strongly toward her unfortunate father whose sufferings she pitied, whose sublime unselfishness she was beginning to glimpse, and against whose isolation her warm, young heart was already at times in rebellion.

Miriam, Bernice, Bessie — three charming types of femininity, the mother with her youthful beauty so wonderfully preserved that she looked more like a sister of the young girls; all accomplished, dressed in the best and latest style, accustomed to mingle in refined and educated social circles — to mar such a trinity by the introduction of a cobbler for husband and father, a mere cobbler with the bent shoulders and wax-stained hands of his calling, was certainly, to say the least, both incongruous and regrettable. Marsh Gordon himself, with the humbleness of a broken spirit, recognized the point. But nevertheless he had justified himself by the unanswerable law of necessity.

"Whatever made you return to cobbling shoes?" protested Miriam, fine scorn as well as indignation vibrating in her voice. "I thought you came to California to make a complete change."

"A change of climate for my health's sake, dear," suggested Marsh, coughing apologetically through his fingers.

"Well, you might have changed your vocation, too. You don't seem to have any longer the spirit of a mouse, Marsh. Why didn't you try for something else to do?"

"I did try — I tried so hard and so long that I had to quit trying or else begin to use up the little family capital. I was at the end of my slender resources, Miriam, before I accepted my present situation. I did not write about my taking it, but you have received your weekly remittances all the time."

"Oh, yes, the remittances came regularly. But I really fancied you had at last gone into some gentlemanly occupation — real estate, for example. Just look at the scores of real estate offices right here in Venice."

"Which precisely accounts for my having recognized the futility of trying such a game. To have rented and furnished an office would have meant the expenditure of capital with only the remote possibility of any returns. I preferred to put our remaining $4500 into this new and pretty bungalow, which can be readily sold again a few years hence, perhaps at an increased price, when it will be time for our little Bessie to follow in her sister's footsteps at Wellesley."

"I am not disapproving of what you did in this matter," replied Miriam. "To have broken into that small family capital would have been little short of a crime."

"Well, you required money to live in the East, dear."

"Of course, of course."

"And although my personal expenses have always been small, I too had to eat and have a place in which to sleep."

"Naturally."

"So, also naturally, I resumed the one trade in which I can gain an opening and earn steady wages. That is why I had to disappoint you, Miriam, by returning to my cobbler's bench. It was not from inclination, I can assure you. But for all your sakes the hard necessity had to be accepted and endured."

"I suppose it was inevitable, Marsh," replied Miriam thoughtfully. "Yes, inevitable. But of course you will recognize that you will have to keep yourself discreetly in the background. It would be fatal to the dear girls' chances to have their father introduced to friends as a common cobbler — a shoe-pegger. You admit that yourself, don't you?"

"Surely, surely," concurred Marsh, humbly and only too glad to end the controversy. "Nobody need know anything about what I do. I have no visitors at the store — no strangers come to my little room there — the shoes to be repaired are always brought to me by one of the assistants. So don't worry on my account, Miriam. I am just thankful and happy to be near you all again."

And with this he moved away toward the veranda at the rear of the house where, at his own request, his bed had been placed.

Miriam kept her seat and reflected. To punctuate her thoughts came the occasional coughing of her husband, who had now retired for the night.

Next day she sent for a carpenter, and the construction of a small detached screened room at the extreme end of the backyard was commenced. Marsh accepted the new arrangement gratefully. Yes, he would be much more comfortable there. He could have all his books around him, and a portable oil stove for chilly evenings. And he freely and fully recognized how right it all was — that his cough should cause no one annoyance. He could go early in the morning to his work, and return in the evening, without disturbing anyone. And yes; he would prefer to have his supper in his pretty summer-house. It would be like old days for him to cook his own breakfast on the little gas stove Miriam had so kindly suggested — anyhow, a cup of coffee and a slice or two of toast was all he required.

Thus it had come about that Marsh Gordon, morning and evening, slipped out and in by the side entrance to the yard, that he rarely now entered the home proper, and that his perpetual absence came to be the recognized order of things for visitors to the family circle.

"My poor husband is an invalid," was Miriam's formula of reply when an inquiry had made some sort of an excuse unavoidable. "He is also a great reader of books, you know, so prefers not to be dis-

turbed. Now, Bessie, my dear, bring Mr. Golightly another dish of ice-cream."

So the evening's entertainment would proceed, and the nominal head of the house be once again conveniently consigned to oblivion.

On the night when little Bessie had been disappointed of her walk home with her daddy, who had been detained by work at the store, Burn Hopkins had arrived from Los Angeles to take dinner with Miriam and her daughters. As Marsh Gordon passed along the side alley with furtive footfall he could hear the clatter of dishes in the kitchen made by the Japanese boy hired for the occasion, and the murmur of happy voices from the dining-room beyond.

In his little screened room Gordon found a tray neatly set — a leg of chicken with a slice of ham, a couple of rolls, a pat of butter, a saucer of stewed fruit, a tumbler of milk — all cold. But he was accustomed now to cold collations, and professed to like them better than a hot meal. So he sat down gratefully at his lonely table, propped a book before him, and read as he ate. After about half-an-hour he threw open the door. He had heard the piano starting up; it was Bessie who was playing, and he loved to listen even from afar to her finely executed pieces, also to her singing at intervals during such a guest evening as the present one.

So long as the music continued Marsh forgot his book. When it ended he resumed his reading. He had already cleared away his tray, and set it on a little side table. It was close upon ten o'clock when Bessie stole into the room.

"Dear daddy, I just wanted to say goodnight. What a shame you have been here all alone, and we so happy. And that chicken couldn't have been nice, all grown cold! But do you know, daddy," she went on vivaciously now and confidentially, "I'm sure Burn Hopkins is going to propose to Bernice tonight? Mother sent me off to bed, and she herself has gone to the dining-room to put back the silver in its case. So they're all alone in the front room, and Bernice is sitting with her eyes cast down, just like this." Demurely the little maid suited the action to her words, then broke again into merry rippling laughter. "So we shall soon be having a wedding in the family, daddy, and I'll be all alone with mama and you."

She would have kissed him, but he just patted her head affectionately.

"Well, off to bed, little dear. The night air is cold. And you played and sang very nicely this evening. That was specially fine, the Valkyrie music. Good night, by bonnie Bessie!"

She was gone, and Marsh Gordon was once more alone with his thoughts. "So Bernice is going to get married? And I haven't even been privileged to see the young man yet. But it's all right. And no doubt this Burn Hopkins is a fine young fellow. Dear, dear! how the years have flown! It seems only yesterday that Bernice was a tiny baby."

And as he dropped his chin on his breast and mused he saw once again the joyous, happy, little home of first married days — Miriam a tenderly loving wife, himself a stalwart young man with fearless courage in his eye and high hope pulsing through his veins.

"After all," he murmured, "memory is an inheritance of riches, for by it we still possess many things that we might believe we had lost."

For between that time and this what a vista of toil, anxiety, and disappointment!

CHAPTER IV

TIGER-LILIES AND COWSLIPS

A FEW days went past during which Marsh Gordon became painfully and increasingly conscious that he was a mighty sick man. It was a period of misty mornings and nights, and the chill moisture-laden atmosphere percolating through the wire-mesh screens of his sleeping room not only aggravated his cough but set up a feverish cold as well. For fever there is only one remedy — rest. But the shoe-pegger toiled on. In the confined space of his little stall at the rear of the store he lost the glorious hours of sunshine that might have had a recuperating effect on his run-down condition.

No one knew better than Marsh that if a man holding his position comes to require a vacation he simply loses his job. Shoes for repair arrived in a steady flow of almost uniform regularity; the accumulation of two or three days of arrears meant complaints from the customers and arduous hours of overtime for the cobbler; a week of suspended activity would have so disarranged this department of the shoe store's business that substituted help would have been inevitable. Therefore the broken-down and enfeebled man clung to his task with desperate tenacity.

But at last there came a morning when Marsh Gordon found himself too weak to get out of bed at his

accustomed early hour and prepare his own simple breakfast as he was accustomed to do. It chanced to be Saturday and therefore a day on which little Bessie did not go to school. About nine o'clock, when she chanced to come into the yard, she was much surprised to hear the sound of her father's cough. In great anxiety and alarm she hastened to his room.

"Daddy!" she exclaimed, as she opened the door and stepped inside. In the one word were concentrated astonishment, dismay, and deep affection.

"Oh, don't worry about me, Bessie dear," replied her father. "But I have just resolved to take a day's rest, so have prepared a little note which I want you to deliver at the shoe store without delay. When you get back say to your mother that I'll be glad if she will allow you to come with me for an afternoon's outing. I see the mist has cleared off, and it is going to be a fine warm day. The open air will do me all the good in the world, and if you'll be my companion, Bessie, we'll take a street car and then go up into one of the little canyons among the Santa Monica hills. I'll show you one of the prettiest spots you ever set eyes on, where I went once or twice before I returned to daily work. We'll take a lunch along with us, and we'll gather wild-flowers and watch the crested quail among the bushes and hear the robins sing."

Bessie's face was already lighted up with a great joy, and in anticipation of the day's delight she clapped her hands.

"Give me the letter, papa. I'll be back in ten min-

utes. I'll run all the way." And without another word she was gone.

Gordon, revived somewhat by the very sunshine of her presence, got up and dressed. He was ready for her before she returned. With her came her mother.

"What's the matter now?" asked Miriam, standing at the doorway. "Bessie tells me you have not been feeling well enough to go to work this morning."

"That is so, my dear," faltered Marsh, apologetically. "My cough was very troublesome during the night."

"So I heard," remarked Miriam. "Really, Marsh, I'm beginning to be afraid lest some of the neighbors complain."

"Well, a day in the country will do me a heap of good. And I suppose Bessie has told you that I'll be glad of her companionship. Oh, I'll take good care of the child; you needn't be frightened, Miriam, on her account."

But Miriam did not need to be persuaded to give her assent.

"Well, it happens to suit our plans all right," she said complacently. "Burn is coming down with his motor — Mr. Hopkins, you know; you have doubtless heard his name — to take Bernice and me to a matinée in Los Angeles. So you'll take Bessie off my hands, and I've no doubt I'll be able to get together a lunch for you. I suppose you will want to start early — you won't require dinner at home."

"No, no; no dinner needed. We'll get away just as soon as the lunch-basket is ready. Eh, Bessie, my dear?"

"I'll help mama with the sandwiches," exclaimed the child, joyfully eager to expedite their departure. "But haven't you had your breakfast yet?" she added, casting a glance around the room.

"Oh, that's all right," replied her father. "I feel fine now and will soon make myself a cup of coffee."

"We'll bring something out for you," said Miriam, condescendingly. "Come along then, Bessie."

Mother and daughter departed. The father was too happy at the thought of a day among the hills with his little darling to feel snubbed or slighted. He took the tray from Bessie's hands, sent her back to assist her mother, and ate in solitude but none the less gratefully. The warm coffee proved a stimulant; he began to feel himself again.

They took the street car and rode through Venice, Ocean Park, and Santa Monica to the northern limits of the last named town. Then on foot they wended their way toward the foothills, Bessie insisting on carrying the lunch basket swung on one arm while with the other she linked herself to her father's elbow. They advanced along a pretty winding road, gradually ascending and several times spanning with rustic bridges the pebbly dried-up bed of a creek. Soon the last habitation was left behind, and they were in a narrow gorge thickly grown with underbrush and traversed by a mere trail that followed the course of the water channel.

After an hour's climb the cleft in the hills widened, and there were occasional spaces where splendid sycamores had room to extend their twisted boughs or an occasional live-oak stood in solitary grandeur.

And now there was a tiny stream in the creek, and the murmurous ripple of tumbling waters, the product of the melting snows on the Sierra high above beginning to feel the first warm kiss of springtide.

Bessie was filled with animation and delight as she viewed each new beauty, jumped from stone to stone across the brook, or stooped to dip her hands in its ice-cold current. They sat down in a little sun-warmed glade and ate their luncheon — a really dainty meal, for as Bessie announced with grave importance she herself had devilled the eggs and prepared the chicken salad — under her mother's directions, of course, she added with conscientious respect for veracity. There was a thermos bottle with hot tea, and ripe luscious oranges by way of dessert. Marsh Gordon imagined himself in a mountain Delmonico's. He had not partaken of a meal so heartily or with such zest of appetite for many a long year. And with a song of quiet joy in his heart he watched his little daughter as she tried to entice a flock of quail with scattered crumbs. But the timid birds scurried away into the dense brushwood, or nodded their plumes from a discreet distance.

Then Bessie sang to him, throwing her whole soul into songs which she had come to know he loved to hear her sing — "In the Gloaming" and "Silver Threads Among the Gold," old-time favorites which he had dug out of a frayed but carefully preserved volume that he had been accustomed to use in the days of long ago, when he himself was a popular favorite in drawing rooms and on concert platforms. These ancient songs awakened in him a flood of ten-

der memories, and also a spirit of great thankfulness that, while Bessie had inherited the physical charms of her mother, from him she derived her love of music.

The bowed and feeble cobbler felt the glow of divine satisfaction that it is after all the qualities of mind that count for most in human heredity, and that in the bright little girl carolling joyfully to him and to the hills, to the trees and to the listening quail, something of the best in himself had been reincarnated — that his own soul, when he at last had become cold clay, would still go singing along. The immortality of biology! — he began to understand the potency of the phrase.

To both father and daughter the afternoon was one of supreme delight, crowned by his discovering in a marshy spot a bed of golden cowslips, also in a little gulch above, a cluster of nodding tiger-lilies. With trembling hands he gathered a bunch of the big orange colored flowers spotted with velvety black. For these very tiger-lilies, also the cowslips which Bessie was delightedly making into another bouquet, were closely associated with the days when he had courted the child's mother.

They carried Marsh Gordon's mind back to one particular Sunday afternoon when Miriam and he had driven from Creston to Afton, had left their buggy to wander along the bonnie banks of Twelve-Mile Creek, and had plucked cowslips and tiger-lilies on their meandering way until their arms were laden with the flowery spoil. And it was in the gloaming of that memorable evening, to the murmur of the

flowing stream, that Marsh had declared his love for Miriam and won her blushing consent to be his bride. God, how his heart had swelled with joy and gratitude and thankfulness!

Almost five and twenty years ago! And retrospect could be contrasted with prospect. But not all had been disappointment, mused Marsh, as his tear-bedimmed eyes rested on the sunshiny face of his little maid.

"Daddy, ain't they just beautiful? Tiger-lilies and cowslips! I'll decorate the parlor, and your room too, papa dear."

When they got home, tired but happy, they found Burn Hopkins' automobile standing outside.

"I suppose he'll be staying for supper," exclaimed Bessie, half regretfully, "and they'll be wanting me to sing. But I love to sing to you best of all, daddy. You know that, don't you, dear?"

She had taken one of his hands in both her own as they stood in the side alley.

"Oh, but I am always listening when you sing, my pretty. Good night! God bless you! You have been a dear little chum for me today."

"And it has been the happiest day in my life, daddy," exclaimed the child fervently as she pressed her lips against his hand.

CHAPTER V

DOWN AND OUT

WHEN Marsh Gordon returned to his work on the Monday, it could not be said that he felt like a giant refreshed, for he was still a weakling and an invalid. But he was feeling fully fifty per cent better than on the previous Friday when he had suffered the break-down, and there was a brave, hopeful smile hovering at the corners of his thin lips. Such had been the achievement accomplished by a single day free from care out in God's own sunshine and fresh air, and in the inspiring companionship of the happy little child whom he so fondly loved.

The proprietor of the shoe store, hearing the familiar hammer again at work, looked in.

"I'm glad to see you back," he remarked somewhat sourly. "We can't afford to let repairs accumulate these days when summer visitors are beginning to flock in."

"Oh, I'll soon make up for lost time, Mr. Brown," replied Gordon cheerfully and with a complacent glance at the heaped-up "hospital" box. "The two days' spell has been to me like the proverbial stitch in time that saves nine. I feel capable of doing double work this morning."

"Well, let us hope you'll do it. But no more days-off in the future, please."

However, Marsh did not worry over the significant hint, and kept plugging away at his accumulated tasks all day long.

And so it went on for a couple of weeks — continuous toil, occasional overtime in the evenings, no relaxation of any kind. For Sunday had to be made, in the very literal application of the word, a day of rest; after each continuous period of six days' work the invalid was too utterly exhausted to do anything else than lie on his back and so prepare himself for the efforts of the coming week. He still enjoyed his evening walks with Bessie along the sanded shore line when the child came to the store to keep him company home. But he did not dare to think of any more Saturday afternoon rambles among the hills.

A little surcease from the continuous grind might have averted the penalty that had finally to be paid. Toward the end of the third week Gordon, after a prolonged and violent paroxysm of coughing, suffered a hemorrhage that necessitated the hiring of a taxi-cab to send him to his place of dwelling. He insisted on dismissing the machine at the end of the street, and slipped quietly and unobtrusively to his room in the rear of the house. He coughed no more that afternoon — just lay exhausted — so that no one came to know that he had quitted work two or three hours before his accustomed time.

"That's about the final knock-out for the old man," had been the remark of Mr. Brown, the employer, as he had watched the disappearing car. "Well, it saves me the unpleasantness of dismissing him. And his graveyard cough had grown to be positively un-

bearable. You could hear him barking half over the store, and customers were already beginning to ask questions and make remarks. Poor devil! I'm sorry for him."

His sorrow materialized in his going to Los Angeles and hiring a husky, young Slovak. "The job will be a permanent one," he promised, when the rate of wages was being fixed.

Meanwhile, Marsh Gordon had sent Bessie to the store with a note expressing the hope that he would be back to work in a day or two. But the day or two prolonged themselves into a couple of weeks, and there was still no prospect of the shoe-pegger leaving his bed.

Miriam was disconcerted and took little pains to conceal the fact that, at this juncture more especially, she resented having a chronic invalid on her hands. Burn Hopkins was a frequent visitor at the home, running down to the beach of an afternoon and taking Bernice and her mother for a spin along the ocean boulevard. This quite often meant an evening stay, with all its responsibilities of supper and a few friends' company to make up a game of bridge or an impromptu concert.

But Miriam met the necessities of the case with her usual resourcefulness. She hired a "school Jap"—a youthful son of Nippon who attended school during the day but was willing to do a few hours' work morning and evening for a small wage. This boy tidied up the invalid's room, and brought him his meals on a tray from the house. For Miriam had resolutely insisted that Bessie was not to hang

around the sick room — the risk of contagion for a child of her age was palpable. Marsh admitted the fact and, although it wrung his heart to do so, joined with his wife in forbidding Bessie to do more than pass a good night or good morning greeting from the safe distance of the screened door. Bernice did hardly that; she was so engrossed with her love affair, and she had so thoroughly absorbed her mother's lessons of selfish indifference, that there were no pangs of conscience to trouble her care-free existence.

So Marsh Gordon came to be more utterly alone than ever. At the store there had been an occasional chat with his employer, coming and going, a nod or a word from passing acquaintances, most evenings the delightful little walk with Bessie. All these last vestiges of sociability had now ruthlessly been swept away, and there was nothing to take their place. For Marsh absolutely refused to call in a doctor; at his age, he declared, any sensible man was his own best doctor. And Kioto, the Japanese boy, although polite and affable, was too well instructed in latter-day hygiene to linger a single minute longer than his duties compelled, in the apartment of a victim of tubercular trouble.

For the first few days Marsh grew weaker. But the weather now became warm and genial, and there were no longer night mists arising from the marshes or blowing in from the ocean. Resting on a long rattan chair he responded to the influence of the caressing sunshine, and the dry balmy air was soothing to his poor lungs. He began to cough less frequently and less violently. By the end of the third week he

was up and about again, strengthened rather than weakened by his period of enforced repose.

At last one morning he decided on reporting himself at the store. There was some little anxiety in his heart, some misgiving that he would not find merely a temporary substitute. He was quite prepared for the rhythmical clap, clap, clap of the shoe-pegger's hammer as he flitted up the courtyard toward the side door. On opening it he found the cobbler's bench occupied by the sturdy, broad-shouldered and red-cheeked Slovak, and a glance revealed the fact that his books, reading stand, and other smaller personal belongings were all together on a shelf, tied up in a couple of packages for convenient removal.

"How do you do?" said Gordon, in the stereotyped phrase of a first introduction.

"Preety goot," replied the other, with a broad smile and a pronouncedly foreign accent. And with this he continued his work industriously and with skill that was unmistakable to the practiced eyes of his predecessor on the cobbling bench.

"Been long here?"

"'Bout tree week."

Gordon made a swift reckoning of dates. The one man had held down the job all through the period of his absence. This certainly looked like fixed possession.

From the other side there was no overture of conversation, so Gordon ventured to open the door and peep into the store. At a counter just a little distance away stood Mr. Brown, talking to one of the clerks. His alert eyes had turned to the opened door, and with the

wave of a hand he signaled that he would speak to Gordon presently. The old shoe-pegger drew back, closed the door, and waited. The other man continued his hammering.

"Glad to see you around again," said the owner of the store when a few moments later he entered and closed the door behind him. "And glad, too, to see you looking so much better, Gordon," he went on with a smooth flow of words, giving no opportunity for any questioning interruption. "Of course you'll recognize that I couldn't keep your place open. Good hands are difficult to find at this time of the year, and our friend Markovitch here insisted on a six months' contract. But I'll be glad to recommend you for another job, though I would suggest some lighter outdoor employment in your case, Gordon."

"Do you happen to know of any opening?" the ex-employee ventured to interpolate.

"Not for the moment. But just refer anyone to me, and I'll speak the good word for you. Sorry I must go now. Here is the small balance due to you." He handed him the familiar pay envelope. "That closes the account between us. And what about those things of yours on the shelf?"

Gordon glanced at the packages. They were a bit too heavy for him to carry — nor did he want to parade himself on the street thus significantly encumbered.

"I'll send a Jap boy down for them tonight," he said quietly. "Thank you, Mr. Brown, and goodby." And he slipped away just as unobtrusively as he had come.

"Well, that's over," murmured the employer with a sigh of obvious relief. The Slovak had raised his eyes, and had momentarily desisted from his pegging. "Poor, old devil," the master went on, addressing his comment now to the new hand. "He was a rattling good workman. Too bad his health broke down. But we can't have derelicts in modern business. You've got a good job, Markovitch. See you hold it. It depends on yourself how soon I'll raise your wages."

"Very goot," grinned the Slovak, good-humoredly. "I'll hold the job all righta, you bet." And with this he resumed his hammering with sturdy vigor that added assurance to his words.

During long weeks after arriving from Iowa, Marsh Gordon had most thoroughly combed Los Angeles, Venice-by-the-Sea and many surrounding towns in search of employment. Only as a last resource had he returned to his trade of a shoe-pegger. He had realized what it would inevitably mean in the end, with the long hours of stooping and confinement. But he had taken the hazard for the sake of those he loved. The sacrifice, however, was unavailing, for now even his particular niche was occupied by one far stronger and more capable of endurance than himself.

While he moved along the street he realized the hopelessness of any other opportunity coming his way. As his late employer had said, a less onerous job in the open air was most assuredly desirable in his case. "Plenty of open air," he grimly reflected, as the ocean breeze fanned his fevered brow; but precious few jobs for anyone and least of all for the down-and-outer, like himself.

Yes, he was beginning to feel down-and-out, fit only for the scrap-heap of worn-out humanity. He had no heart for the moment to put forth any further effort. He just seated himself on the sea sand, and gazed out across the billowing ocean. He would bribe Kioto to keep possession of his packages for an hour or two that evening, and only bring them to his room under cover of darkness. For Miriam must not know that his place at the shoe store had been permanently filled — that at last he was without occupation and perhaps his earning capacity at an end.

But ere very long there came a whisper of returning hope and courage. The genial sunshine had begun to penetrate to the marrow of his bones; his lungs breathed in gratefully the soft, balmy air, even the continuous murmur of the waves was soothing to his overstrung nerves. It was physical comfort reacting on his mental condition. He continued to bask in the sun, with a sense of lazy contentment stealing over him. How fine to have nothing to do! But tomorrow he would bestir himself, secure another job, and be able to explain to Miriam that it was only a case of changing situations. He did not blame himself for the misfortune that had befallen, but he shrank from the blame of others.

Yes, he was still hopeful, and hope is a hostage that heals the scars and aches of the heart and covers over the ashes of disappointment with an optimistic belief that whatever is to be will be, and that whatever is, is best.

CHAPTER VI

BERNICE BECOMES ENGAGED

THE young attorney, Burn Hopkins, had hung out his shingle in one of the finest office buildings in Los Angeles. But in that city of overcrowded professions he had speedily realized that patient waiting for business was a necessary part of the game. This was so far fortunate in that it left him ample leisure for a more pleasing suit than one involving attendance at the law courts. He was becoming more and more constant in his devotions to Bernice Gordon; he already occupied the position of an accepted lover, and it was now only a question of naming the happy day.

Miriam was doing everything in her power to expedite the wedding. She had made up her mind that Burn was not to meet her husband. In regard to the latter she had not exactly spoken anything actually untrue, but she had given utterance to half-truths, and this form of equivocation soon grows irksome. She had to be constantly on her guard during conversation and on the alert to prevent the possibility of any chance meeting.

However, Burn had long since ceased to probe for information. He had evidently accepted the situation, regarded Bernice's father as a recluse and a chronic invalid, and was so head-over-ears in love with the

young lady herself that the matter gave him no further concern. But Marsh Gordon's long spell of illness was adding to Miriam's anxieties, not on the invalid's account but lest Burn's frequent visits should through some mischance result in the men being thrown together. To guard against this Miriam encouraged automobile outings, theatre matinées, and other methods of passing the time away from the home. But although this is an age of freedom for young people, she was old-fashioned enough always quietly to insist on playing the part of chaperon.

It was a lonely afternoon in early July when Burn drove up in his automobile to the little bungalow, and gave the accustomed " honk-honk " signal that he was waiting for the ladies to emerge. A program had been arranged that they should motor through the superbly beautiful Topanga Canyon and afterwards dine at the sign of the good ship *Cabrillo,* the famous hostelry on the pier. Bessie was at school, but they were to return for her in the evening in time for dinner.

In answer to the signal Bernice came forth with a very rueful countenance. Her mother had a bad headache, and the outing would have to be postponed. But Burn was not to be thus denied.

" Well, we'll take the drive alone, Bernice," he gaily declared.

" I don't know whether mama will consent."

" Oh, I'll see about that," replied Burn. " I caught a glimpse of your mother there at the window." And with the fine audacity of youth he tripped up the veranda steps.

Miriam had barely time to assume the proper head-

achy look before the citadel was being stormed. Burn was sorry she felt out of sorts, although his voice and look somewhat belied the proffered sympathy. But it was far too fine a day for Bernice to miss the drive through the mountains. He would take all care of her, and they would be back by six o'clock for the evening appointment. Such frank, eager impetuosity was not to be denied, and soon the young lovers departed, happy in each other's exclusive companionship — just as the far-seeing mother had deliberately planned. She smiled complacently as she mixed the colors on her tiny palette and, the headache pose abandoned, gave herself up to a quiet afternoon of china painting.

Topanga Canyon is unquestionably the crowning beauty of Southern California's many beauties. God made the mountains but man made the wonderful road that winds its way up to their heights, threading the gorge that cleaves the mighty barrier of the Sierra Madre, crossing its cascading stream now by a rustic bridge, anon over a shallow riffle, rounding the spurs and climbing the precipices, presenting everywhere to the view scenes of sublime grandeur and transcendent loveliness.

Burn drove his big car with sure eye and steady hand. It was not a record for speed but a record for lingering that he was trying to make. At times he halted so that they might enjoy to the full the glorious panorama unfolded beneath their feet. Then came an inviting open space canopied by shade trees and carpeted with flowers. A great wide spreading sycamore provided a natural garage where the engine might cool off. So they descended, and wandered

away among the bushes. When half an hour later they emerged there was a shy blush on Bernice's cheeks, and on Burn's countenance the radiant glow of triumph.

"So that's settled, darling," he murmured, as he tucked the lap robe over her knees. "The twenty-first!" And after a little precautionary glance around he boldly kissed her and hugged her in a manner which suggested that the performance was in the nature of an encore. Only then did he set the starter a-buzzing, back his car, and begin the downward journey home.

At dinner that evening, in the *Cabrillo's* spacious hold that served as a banquet hall and cabaret, Burn Hopkins insisted on opening a bottle of champagne. And when the three glasses were tinkled — little Bessie was not a participant in the wine-drinking ceremony — the toast that the happy young lover proposed was a very short one. "The twenty-first!" he exclaimed, as he nodded gaily to Miriam.

The mother's heart instantly understood.

"All happiness!" she replied, her eyes flashing with quiet satisfaction.

Bessie also understood.

"My, but you've been a long time in fixing up things," she remarked with childlike frankness, "I heard Bernice say that —"

But a swift look from the young lady in question put an abrupt stop to the flow of confidences, freezing Bessie to the temperature of the ice-cream to which the little maid had discreetly switched her attention.

"I am so glad, my dear Burn," Miriam was now saying, "that everything is arranged. Of course it comes

as a great surprise to me, this early date. Only two weeks for final preparations. However, you know your plans best."

"August is the proper month for my vacation," interposed the accepted suitor. "You see I must be back in early September for that big case, Davies versus the Sierra Lumber Company. There are three attorneys on our side, and they couldn't possibly get along without me," he went on, laughing gaily. "Oh, you may smile, Mrs. Gordon, but I've been studying lumber to beat the band, and know all about redwood and pine, shingles, running feet, short lengths, and other technical things. Then August is the very best season for the Yellowstone Park, and it is there Bernice and I are going to spend the honeymoon."

"Hope you won't get into hot water," ventured Bessie, a mischievous twinkle in her eye. This time, to her great relief, her remark was not resented; even Bernice laughed merrily with the others, so that harmony and gaiety were restored.

"Oh, we are not going to tumble into any geyser, little sis," responded Burn, playfully pinching her ear. "Too bad you can't be coming along also. You would just love to see the young bears romping around."

"Bears can teach folks how to hug. But Bernice and you don't require any lessons, do you?"

The crisp audacity of this remark tickled Burn immensely, and Bernice, although she reddened slightly, could not but join in his laughter. Attention, however, was opportunely diverted by a burst of Hawaiian music from a group of costumed instrumentalists on

the stage. Thus the evening passed gaily, till the growing hilariousness of some groups in the mixed company suggested to Miriam that it was time for her to shepherd her flock in the direction of home.

It was too late for Burn to step indoors. As they stood on the side-walk Miriam could hear her husband's racking cough from the distance. But to her relief the young lovers were too intent on saying good-night to pay any heed. Miriam, however, gave no chance for undue lingering, and was thankful when the red light at the rear of the automobile was speeding into the distance.

"Go inside, girls," she said. "I'm going round for a minute to see how your father is."

Miriam found Marsh still up and reading.

"Your cough seems to be worse tonight," she remarked, standing as usual in the doorway. "Why don't you go out for a few weeks onto the desert? The dry air would do you good. The beach is not the place for you, I'm certain."

"Probably not," he replied submissively. "I'll think about it. The desert certainly sounds attractive."

For a moment she wondered if the remark had a touch of satire in it, but she contented herself with a cold "Good-night," departing without mention of Bernice's approaching nuptials.

And in the parlor where she rejoined her daughters Miriam imposed a strict injunction on both of them that, for the sake of their father's health, not one word about the wedding was to be spoken to him meanwhile.

"He is in a highly nervous state," she explained.

"Now, remember, Bessie, if you open your lips you will incur my severe displeasure. Promise me not to do so."

The little girl promised, half reluctantly, half sorrowfully. Why should her poor sick father be debarred from all the happy things in the home?

CHAPTER VII

THE CALLING WILDERNESS

THE desert! To Marsh Gordon the word that had fallen from his wife's lips had had, in literal truth, an attractive sound. There had been no *double entendre* in his reply. When she was gone he sat back in his chair and gave full rein to his imagination.

The desert! Wide, illimitable, a place of peaceful solitude. Like a sick or wounded creature of the wild he was beginning to long for some lonely retreat where he could die — alone. He had no actual experience of the desert, but he had glimpsed it from the railroad train, and had been smitten with its mystic lure — a lure that appeals, perhaps, only to the man with poetry in his soul. The rosy pink of dawn, the drowsy haze of noontide, the glorious violet and heliotrope on the encompassing mountains at the sunset hour — he had seen them all, and the changing moods of the mighty wilderness had left a profound impression on his mind. He had been even able to find beauty in the pallid sage brush that dotted the landscape, in the occasional patches of deep green mesquite, in the tall yuccas that here and there raised their antlered heads against the horizon. And over all a brooding silence that was sublime. The desert, grand and glorious to those who have eyes to see and hearts to understand!

As Marsh Gordon pondered that night, the attraction grew to fascination, and when he had laid himself down to sleep there came to him dreams of a couch on the desert sands with the star-bespangled firmament for canopy. In these dreaming hours the first seeds of a great change in his life were sown.

But during the days that followed he was feverish again and weak — a sick man undergoing the vicissitudes of the malady that had him in its deadly grip. He was without ambition, without hope, without the nerve to devise ways and means for any change. And during these days he was more than ever alone, seldom seeing anyone but the Japanese boy who attended to his simple wants, and little Bessie when she came to give him morning or evening greeting. To the child he invariably returned a few words of good cheer — all was well, he was getting along fine, he would be out and about again in a very few days.

The little girl's visits were brief — Miriam saw to that, for everyone was busy in the home completing the trousseau of the bride and otherwise preparing for the wedding, so that a call for Bessie was quite in order when her absence became unduly prolonged. Of Bernice he saw nothing — she was away with her fiancé many days and most evenings, entirely with her mother's approval, for Miriam did not want to have Burn about the house — within possible earshot of the invalid's compromising cough that might have provoked questions and precipitated complications. Miriam occasionally looked in upon the sick man, mainly to reiterate her advice, it would almost seem, that in his prompt departure to some dry, warm retreat

on the desert now lay his only hope of salvation. She even left him some folders descriptive of camps and sanitariums where almost hopeless tubercular cases had been miraculously cured.

These folders Marsh Gordon read with care and deepening interest. With rest, and the restfulness of mind engendered by his final and firm determination that, come what might, he would never again resume the servitude of ten-hours-a-day manual labor, came a reviving flutter of hope. Once again he climbed out of the depths of utter despair. Yes, out on the desert he might even yet regain his health. In one of the printed medical recommendations that helped to make up the folders there was an injunction that freedom from care was one of the greatest aids to permanent cure.

Freedom from care! The words lingered with him. Their meaning grew and grew with talismanic effect upon his mentality. He had never been free from care during all his married life. On the twenty-first day of this very month would be rounded out the quarter century of unbroken anxiety which he had silently endured. His silver wedding day! He was awaiting the anniversary, waiting for Miriam to speak about it, glad in a measure that it seemed to have escaped her attention, for he had no gift of the regulation precious metal, not even a silver teapot or tray, to bestow upon her as a tribute of his abiding devotion.

Their interchange of gifts during married life had necessarily been few and far between, and in decreasing frequency as the years had rolled on. But for his unfortunate break-down in health he would have been

able to make her some little offering on so notable an occasion. His inability to do so had added to the care oppressing him while he lay sick abed. Yet freedom from care was a prime essential to recovery. He read the physician's dictum over again. It strengthened him.

"Let the silver wedding go — let all thought of it go. Silver weddings are only for the rich and prosperous. They can assuredly have no place in the domestic economy of an impoverished shoe-pegger."

The very thought brightened him. Unconsciously he was beginning to absorb the philosophy of the doctor's advice to lay all cares aside as the necessary preliminary for taking a cure. His first burden had been thrown away. No silver wedding anniversary to worry over or regretfully brood upon! The determination made him a little more care-free even now.

Into the desert he could take with him only very few of his personal belongings. First of all he would require his little portable kit of cobbling tools — thereby he would undoubtedly be able to earn a meal or a night's lodging, performing a well-appreciated service, no doubt, for some lonely rancher or miner, and preserving his own self-respect by paying for what he received. Then, of course, he would take some books.

But right here he paused to think. Why "of course"? Wouldn't it be fine just to be a tramp on the desert, to wander around as one chose, to get one's reading from the rocks and sands and scrub, the coyotes and the beetles, the uplifted hills sublime in their rugged nakedness, the sun and moon and the twinkling stars?

Let the books be left behind! An heroic resolve, for books had been his life-long companions, purveyors of happiness, consolers in adversity, stimulants to thought at all times. But the books would now be abandoned. His resolve was made. His shoulders straightened, his mind expanded. Care was being jettisoned at a rapid rate. He caught himself humming appreciatively the refrain of one of the old-time songs with which he had delighted many an audience — "The Vagabond":

Homeless, ragged, and tanned,
Under the changeful sky!
Who so free in the land,
Who so contented as I?

Clothes need not worry him — he had only one half-respectable suit in any case, and a rolled blanket could carry a toothbrush and change of underwear. Just this tiny swag, and his little tool box, together with his stout walking stick standing in a corner of the room. And Marsh Gordon was simply astounded by the realization of how very, very little the care-free desert tramp really requires.

But there was still Miriam, Bernice, and Bessie to think about. Ah! here came the rub. But an hour of musing wonderfully smoothed away all difficulties. His wife would be obviously relieved by his departure, Bernice would no doubt be married and looked after before long, Bessie would be the sole responsibility on her mother's hands.

To part from dear wee Bessie would mean a terrible heart-wrench. But in his present sick condition he

was no fit companion for the child — their association even now had been pretty well reduced to that of the plague-stricken people in Bunyan's tale where the unsmitten brought food for the smitten by laying it on a stone, calling out, and then hurriedly taking themselves off again. On due reflection it was right and proper that even Bessie should be relieved of his presence — for awhile only, perhaps, for if the desert did come to effect a cure he would return and gather the dear child to his breast as he had hardly ever ventured to do before.

So for everyone's sake the change he was contemplating was the best thing possible. He drew a deep breath of relief when he arrived at this sure conviction. He even smiled happily, for cares were vanishing one by one, like wisps of mist kissed by the morning sun. Only one matter remained in doubt. There must be some provision for the dear ones he was leaving behind.

But there was a solution for this difficulty also. He crossed over to his little trunk, unlocked it, threw aside a superincumbent layer of clothes, and surveyed the row of small canvas sacks that contained his day-by-day dime savings. Thank God, he had made and stuck to that early resolve of a system of methodical, if small, economies. The amount was all in dimes, just as he had dropped the little silver coins one by one into each bag until it was filled to capacity, and a new one had to be obtained from some bank on the morrow.

The hour was late — he had kept on thinking and planning until all the little town around him was

asleep. And the task of counting would take considerable time. But he tackled it, determined to check the record.

First of all he poured out the contents of each sack until there was a great heap of shining silver on the centre of the table. Then he paused to do some preparatory figuring — twenty-five years of 365 days, with six leap-year days thrown in. This should give $913.10. He now began stacking the coins in little pillars of ten. The job was a long one, but, growing more expert as he proceeded, he at last completed it.

And, lo and behold! there was the amount correct to a dime — $913.10, for it wanted two days yet of the twenty-first day of the month, his wedding anniversary, and next morning's contribution would adjust the tally. He spent another hour in re-filling nine of the sacks, each with the exact amount of $100, then tying them securely and marking with ink on the canvas the value of the contents. The balance of $13 he rolled up into little packets, bank fashion, one dollar in each roll. He put these by themselves in another sack, and finally restored the entire hoard to its accustomed place of hiding.

Marsh Gordon stood erect. There was something of new strength in his figure, new strength in his resolute smile of satisfaction. He knew now why Providence had prompted him to accumulate that cash reserve. The hour of real emergency, the justification for its use, were at hand. Nine hundred dollars would provide a year's living in the little rent-free home. The balance of thirteen dollars would be ample capital for a peripatetic cobbler on the desert — three

dollars together with the small change in his pocket would transport him to Los Angeles and thence by railroad to the borderland of the wilderness where his tramping would begin with perhaps ten dollars still in hand.

At last, in the "wee sma' hoors ayont the twal," Gordon laid himself down to sleep. And he slept the deep, tranquil sleep of the care-free child. He did not even dream — the calling desert was no longer a dream; it was the assuredly promised land already made free of entry to the homeless wanderer.

CHAPTER VIII

RENUNCIATION

WHEN he arose next morning Marsh Gordon was a changed man. For weeks past he had, more than ever before, been perturbed and worried and dissatisfied both with himself and with his hard fate. All that feeling was now gone. In the process of self-analysis he had come to recognize clear truths, and in frankly recognizing them had attained a wonderful placidity of mind.

He had some time before fully realized that a drier climate than that of Venice-by-the-Sea afforded him the only hope of a cure — a slender hope, but still one that afforded at least some chance of restored health and strength. But this knowledge up to now had only served to depress him, for the goal seemed to be impossible of attainment. While daily bread for those dependent on him had to be earned, it had seemed impossible to quit the slavery of the cobbler's bench. But now that he saw the way to emancipation, his spirits rose. And his soul was filled with wonderment as to how easy it all was. He had been sitting for years with heavy iron shackles around his wrists, and had all this time failed to notice their disproportionate size — failed to see that it was only necessary to slip his hands through to be free.

With this very thought there came, even already, signs of physical change. His eye was brighter, his voice less quavering, his whole demeanor one of greater confidence and self-reliance. As he paced the little room he braced his shoulders, and was surprised to find that he could straighten out the shoe-maker's hump without inducing a fit of coughing. Outside it was a fine day of sunshine. He reached for his walking stick, and sallied forth. He wanted to continue his self-communing, and as an aid to this he felt that he must be alone with Nature — among the hills, along the ocean fringe, anywhere in the great solitudes where the divine spirit manifests itself most clearly to man.

His heart was still filled with love for the wife and the daughters whom, mainly for their own sake, he was on the eve of abandoning. And during the long day, up in the canyon where Bessie and he had had their delightful little picnic, among the cowslips and the tiger-lilies once again, he mused fondly and tenderly over old days. Any vague thoughts that might have been recently shaping themselves in his mind, that Miriam had sacrificed him almost entirely for the sake of their children, were banished. He was looking upon her now only as the fond and devoted mother, and feeling grateful to her for her splendid management that had reared the one daughter to beautiful and accomplished womanhood, and the other to sweet and charming girlhood.

"Dear, brave Miriam," he murmured. "What a noble life of self-denial and endurance! It is I myself who have been her greatest disappointment — who have made her marriage a dismal failure, a constant,

heart-breaking struggle to make ends meet — a fight for bread and mere existence."

And in this mood of contriteness and self-abasement, he gathered for her a bouquet of the tiger-lilies she had loved so much in the old days of courtship, when she had been used to call him "handsome, brave, and strong," to give him frequent words of praise for his splendid voice and singing, to ask him constantly for his opinion about things and linger on his spoken words, in short to reveal the true and perfect amiability of her real character, which the unhappy martyrdom of marriage had dimmed to his eyes but could not efface from his memory.

While he thus reflected, he little knew that Miriam at that very moment was with Bernice and Burn, enjoying an afternoon "tango" in the most fashionable hotel at Long Beach, a few miles distant, whither the party of three had motored in a superb new limousine which the bridegroom of the morrow was trying out as a gift for his bride on their wedding day.

"Close on five o'clock already!" exclaimed Marsh Gordon in great surprise as, after making his bouquet, he consulted the little gun-metal watch he was in the habit of wearing. The modest chronometer lingered between his fingers. The unexpected lateness of the hour was momentarily forgotten. He was thinking now of the watch itself, for it had been a gift from Miriam — a pledge of her love bestowed a few days after their engagement.

And for more than five-and-twenty years he and the little gun-metal watch had been daily companions. It had proved to be a wonderful time-keeper, seldom call-

ing for an overhaul or for repairs. And its steady tick-tick-tick had come to be for Marsh Gordon a sort of symbolization of his wife's constant love. When she was far away he had often thought that her heart was beating, just as the watch was ticking, for him all the time. It was a pleasing fancy, and even if Marsh could on any occasion have afforded a costlier chronometer, set with jewels and encased with gold, it is doubtful whether he would have exchanged for it the humble gun-metal watch to which were attached so many tender sentiments — the gift from his Miriam. Even now before he returned it to his waistcoat pocket he pressed its smooth-worn surface to his lips and uttered a little sigh of affection for the donor. Then he hurried down the canyon — the night would have fallen before he could possibly reach home.

"My goodness, we were beginning to think you were lost," exclaimed Miriam as she greeted him at the door of his screened room. "Bernice and I had just come out to see you. We have important news."

She spoke with an uneasy tremor in her voice, and there was an uneasy look in her eyes as she drew back to let him enter. She stepped into the room after him, and when Bernice followed, placed a protecting arm across the girl's shoulders.

"Important news," Marsh faltered. He, too, was disturbed, for he could not fail to notice his wife's agitation. "Where is Bessie?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, Bessie's all right," replied Miriam. The commonplace question seemed to restore her to composure. She was smiling now. "My news is about Bernice.

The dear girl is going to be married." And she drew Bernice still closer and kissed her.

"So I have understood for some time." The words were spoken coldly, his manner became cold. For he could not but remember that Bernice's lover had never been presented to him — that pretty nearly all he knew about him was from Bessie's childish prattle.

"Well, the date is fixed. The marriage takes place tomorrow."

For a moment Marsh Gordon stood rigid. Like a flash came the thought that all this had been studiously kept from him until the very last moment. Silence in such a case had amounted to deception, and he was appalled that he, the father, could have been treated with such utter lack of consideration.

"I came for you to wish me good luck, papa," said Bernice, with a sweet smile and in the soft cooing voice that had always been as music to her lover's ear.

But Marsh had hardly heard her.

"They are to be married on the twenty-first?" he asked, addressing his question to Miriam.

"Yes — tomorrow," she replied.

For a moment he fixedly regarded her. He was wondering whether she remembered the special significance of the date in their own lives. Bernice's nuptials would take place on the silver anniversary of her parents' wedding. Great heavens! Was Miriam oblivious of the fact? Had she forgotten all about the day which he had always kept in such tender memory?

As his eyes searched hers, these were the questions in his heart. But Miriam gave no sign.

"Sit down," she said, motioning him to his accustomed chair close to the reading stand on the table. "Unfortunately we can't stay long, as we have an engagement out — a little dance in Bernice's honor at the Grahams'."

He had automatically done her bidding and dropped into the chair. But both mother and daughter remained standing. He rested an elbow on the table; his fingers nervously but silently drummed upon it. He did not speak — just waited for her to continue.

"Of course you've heard about Burn Hopkins — such a nice young fellow, rich parents, but well off already on his own account, and with a splendid career ahead of him. I count our dear Bernice very lucky indeed, and feel myself relieved of no end of responsibility. Well, Burn quite suddenly made up his mind, and the wedding was fixed for tomorrow. Too bad you can't be present, Marsh, but I excused you on account of your serious illness — I made things all right for you, don't worry."

"Very considerate," he interposed, in a low voice. His fingers no longer drummed; his hand was clenched now.

"And I was going to suggest that tomorrow you might take another ramble among the hills"— she glanced at the tiger-lilies which he had set down on the table. "Or what would you say to a visit to the Old Soldiers' Home? People say it is most interesting — everything complete, even to a splendid hospital. You would enjoy the brass band, too. I'm just study-

ing your own comfort, Marsh. There will be quite a number of automobiles here for the wedding, and the yard will be wanted for them. All the racket and excitement would be sure to upset your nerves."

He was hardly listening to her now. His mind was harkening back to her suggestion of a holiday for himself on his daughter's wedding day at a home for aged and more or less decrepit war veterans, perambulating the hospital wards or treating himself to the delirious enjoyment of the afternoon brass band performance. The cold-bloodedness of the proposition chilled him to the marrow of his bones. For the moment he was incapable of framing a reply. Miriam hastened to make an end of the painful interview.

" There now, Bernice, your papa will kiss your hand and wish you all the good fortune for which you came to ask him. Such a pity that your cough keeps us all so apart, Marsh, my dear. But don't forget my suggestion about the desert. Now we must be going. Good night. Your supper is all ready — being kept warm in the oven. Kioto will bring it out for you. Good night again."

In a bewildered maze so far as Marsh Gordon was concerned, the two women had departed. He was dimly conscious of having raised Bernice's hand to his lips, of having bestowed upon her his paternal blessing, of having noticed the suspicion of tears in the pretty girl's eyes as she had impulsively thrown an arm around his shoulder, drawn him down to her, and kissed him on the brow. He was not quite certain whether he had shaken hands with Miriam.

But as he resumed his seat and gazed steadily into

the vacancy before him, this he realized — realized with a dull aching pain in his heart — that one of his children was to be married on the morrow, that he had not been bidden to the feast, and that his wife had even forgotten the anniversary of her own wedding day. And the words of Kipling throbbed through his brain:

And it isn't the shame and it isn't the blame
That stings like a white hot brand —
It's coming to know that she never knew why
. . . . . .
And never could understand.

CHAPTER IX

DEPARTURE

WHEN the Japanese boy brought the supper tray, little Bessie came too, all ready for the evening party, looking sweetly pretty in her white frock and with her golden curls tossed around her shoulders. Kioto laid the small table cloth, arranged the viands, and departed.

"I can only stay a minute, daddy dear," exclaimed the child, "but I ran out to say good night. We are all going to a party."

"So your mother told me. And about the wedding tomorrow. I am so glad to know of Bernice's happiness."

Marsh Gordon, in speaking to Bessie, was his old gentle self again. He was even smiling pleasantly if just a trifle wistfully.

"I'm so sorry you are too sick to come to the wedding, daddy," murmured Bessie, ruefully. "Is your cough so very, very bad?"

"It is very bad, dear. I'm afraid it would disturb the guests. A wedding is no place for a hopeless invalid."

He coughed behind his hand — a voluntary effort this time to give verisimilitude to his words. It certainly was a bad cough, with a cavernous echo that might well distress any listener.

"Oh, don't say that, papa. Mama told me you are thinking of going out on the desert, to get well again."

The father paused for a moment before replying.

"Yes, my dear little Bessie," he said at last, taking her hand in both his own and speaking with great tenderness. "I am going to try the desert air to see if it can do me any good. And you'll all be happier at home here, without me to worry you."

"No, no, daddy," cried the child, nestling close to him and putting her disengaged arm around his shoulders. "Although I see so little of you, I'm always glad to know that you are not far away. I'll miss you terribly."

"Bessie! — Bessie!" It was the voice of Miriam calling.

There was a great lump in Gordon's throat and a tear trickled down his cheek. He drew her closer to him so as to conceal his agitation. "God bless and guard you, my wee darling. But you must go now — your mother and Bernice will be waiting for you. Good night, sweetheart." And he kissed her on the brow.

"Good night, daddy dear. I'll see you in the morning." She shook her curls into orderliness, then blew him a kiss from her rosy lips as she flitted away like a little fairy.

"Goodby," murmured Gordon to himself. "Not good night, dear child, but goodby. By tomorrow morning your daddy will be far away — a wanderer in the wilderness."

And again he found himself humming the old refrain:

On the other side of Jordan,
In the sweet fields of Eden,
Where the tree of life is blooming,
There is rest for me.

Then once more he fell a-musing. The supper, forgotten, lay untouched before him. A full hour elapsed. At last he bestirred himself, and pulled out his watch.

"Past nine o'clock."

Once again his fingers lingered on the well polished gun-metal case. He sprang it open, and read the inscription within—"To M. G. from Miriam." He contemplated the letters for a few moments, then, snapping the case shut, returned the watch to his pocket. This time there was no betrayal of sentiment—no kiss bestowed as up in the canyon earlier in the day among the cowslips and the tiger-lilies.

He rose to his feet. His face was very grave. He stepped to the door, opened it, and gazed across the yard. The home was in complete darkness. Returning to the table, he pushed the untasted supper aside, and, producing writing materials from a drawer proceeded to pen a letter.

The letter was a fairly long one, but it did not take him long to write it, for its terms had shaped themselves in his mind during the hour of preliminary meditation. He held it in his hand for final perusal. Written in the clear, beautiful penmanship of which Marsh Gordon had been always justifiably proud, were the following words:

"*My very dear Miriam:*

"Before our conversation this evening I had already decided to go out on the desert, partly in quest of health, partly from the conviction that it will be best for you all that I should seek the isolation which is right and proper in the case of serious tuberculosis. The decision made, there is no reason to delay my leave-taking. I depart tonight on my pilgrimage. Tomorrow my dear Bernice and her young friends will not be worried by my presence. I hope the wedding will go merrily — as all weddings should — as our own went on the very same day five-and-twenty years ago, although somewhat to my surprise you seem to have forgotten the anniversary.

"Whither exactly to turn my steps I do not yet know. In a measure chance will decide. If possible you will hear from me at intervals. But as I shall no longer be a regular wage-earner and breadwinner, it is necessary that I should leave some provision behind. And now I have a confession to make — a secret which is the only one I have kept from you during the entire period of our married life.

"Every day for twenty-five years, in view of some possible great emergency just such as the one that has now arisen, I have laid aside one silver dime, until now my hoard has amounted to $913.10. Of this sum I leave you $900 in the identical canvas sacks that have served me for a savings bank — you will find this money in my trunk, the key of which I enclose. The balance of $13.10, together with a dollar or two of loose change which I have in my purse, will suffice for all my immediate requirements. As I have re-

solved not to worry any longer about the future, I shall leave the future, so far as I am concerned, to look after itself.

"I derive peace of mind from the thought that, while Bernice is happily married to a man who can take every care of her, for you and Bessie there is, with due economy, a full year's provision of life's necessaries. Therefore neither shall I worry about you and dear little Bessie, God bless her. I go forth to seek my cure absolutely a care-free man, liberated at last from the daily continuous grind to earn sustenance for those dependent on me — a grim struggle both of mind and of body, the terribleness of which, without remission during twenty-five long years, I think you have hardly realized. Leaving this money behind, I can for the present at all events lay down my burden of anxiety.

"Dear wife, at times recently I have fancied that your love for me has waned into indifference. But even if this be the truth, there is no blame in my heart for you. A sick man becomes but a sorry lover. And I am deeply conscious of my failure in life, my inability to rise from the humble station to which insistent responsibilities have always seemed to keep me chained, the vanishing of all the ambitious dreams of young manhood.

"These ambitions belonged to the time when both you and I were young. I have grown steadily older with the years; you have remained young despite the years, for you are just as pretty, almost as youthful looking, as on the day you gave me your heart and hand. I recognize the difference that has thus grown

up between us. I have had no right to the continuance of your ardent young love and can in my heart honor you for having devoted your robust health and strength to the upbringing of our darling children. To you all the credit for unselfishness and self-sacrifice is rightfully due.

"So now there remains only the one word — adieu. In the literal meaning of this tender word I commend you all to God's keeping. Goodby, Miriam; goodby, Bernice; goodby, little Bessie. Heaven bless each one of you, and may I find you all well and happy if God wills that I should return.

"Affectionately,

"MARSH GORDON."

He read the letter carefully a second time, then crossed over to the trunk, and after taking out the old sack with the thirteen dollars in rolls locked it again securely. He deposited the money bag on the table, and in doing so his hand touched the bouquet of tiger-lilies. A thought occurred to him. He paused.

After a moment of reflection he drew forth one of the stems, and, cutting it close to the blossom, pinned to the flower a scrap of paper inscribed with the two words — "For Memory." Then he placed the flower together with the key of the trunk in the letter, sealed the envelope, and taking it with him left the room.

Although Marsh Gordon had of late rarely entered the home, he had always retained his latch key. So he was able to gain admission into the dark and deserted bungalow. Turning up the lights in the parlor, he surveyed preparations for the morrow that must

have taken quite a time to complete. When he moved along the corridor, he found in his wife's room, set out upon a table, a whole array of wedding gifts, some of them displayed, others in packages or leather cases bearing the monograms of the happy young couple. With a sickening feeling at his heart, he glanced into Bernice's room. There, resting on the couch and hanging over the backs of chairs, were gowns that must have required weeks for their making. He knew now that the coming event had been concealed from him for quite a long time — that Miriam had equivocated, to use the mildest term, when this very evening she had led him to believe that Burn Hopkins had quite suddenly claimed an early date for the wedding.

He realized that his presence in these rooms was an intrusion. Unconsciously he began to move with the uneasy stealthfulness of a burglar. With this feeling oppressing him, his desire was to get quickly done with the business that had brought him there and be gone.

So he turned to his wife's apartment, and opening a drawer in the dresser to which he knew she almost daily repaired, he thrust the letter under a heap of gloves, ribbons, laces, and other feminine oddments. Then turning down the lights as he proceeded, he passed through the house and emerged onto the veranda, leaving the home all in darkness as he had found it.

Back in the screened summer-house, Gordon soon completed his arrangements for departure. He had no appetite to eat, but he put the portion of now cold

roast chicken, also the accompanying slices of bread and a couple of apples into wrapping paper, and placing the provender with the few selected articles of underwear, the tooth-brush and the cake of soap, finally rolled all up in the big blue blanket that had served on his bed as a counterpane, and strapped the bundle into a neat and convenient roll.

It was unnecessary for him to inspect his tool-kit — he had always kept it fully equipped with hammer, knives, awls, a box of pegs, a bunch of waxed ends, a supply of soles and of repairing leather, strap, apron, everything complete and arranged in precise orderliness. The box was shaped like a small grip, and provided with a stout leather handle. So with this grip in one hand, his walking stick in the other, and the blanket roll slung from his shoulder, Marsh Gordon was ready for the road.

He gave one glance around the room that had been his room for several months — a regretful glance, for the place had become endeared to him by the companionship of books, by spells of restfulness and thought, by the quietness and solitude he had come to love, even by the very sickness he had patiently endured and, for the time being, partially conquered. His glance fell upon the remaining tiger-lilies.

"Little Bessie loves flowers," he murmured, as he took a vase from the mantelshelf, poured some water into it from the pitcher on the table, and arranged the rich blooms so that the little girl might not find them withered and wilted in the morning.

"God bless her!" he added, as he switched off the light and stepped into the balmy night air. Outside

he stood motionless for a few moments. Everything was very still — even at this distance he could hear the gentle moaning of the ocean.

Then the wanderer, making for a new land of hope, staff in hand like the pilgrims of old, moved on his way toward the great unknown.

CHAPTER X

TOWARD THE LAND OF EXILE

THE night was still young, and Venice-by-the-Sea was all aflame with lights and astir with gaiety. As he passed the thoroughfare leading to the pier, Marsh Gordon could hear the strains of music from the cabarets, the strident voices of the "barkers" in front of show booths, the shuffle of feet in the dancing halls. But he moved on, toward the interurban car-line terminus. Here was a little throng awaiting, and, profiting by the occasion, was a wheedler of small coin, whose specialty lay in guessing the weight of individuals. He stood beside a portable weighing machine.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I can guess your weight within five pounds. Step onto the scales. Get your correct weight. If I'm right, one nickel. If I'm wrong, nothing to pay at all"— this was the patter of the speculator in avoirdupois.

Gordon listened. Yes, he would like to know his weight at the start of his tramping expedition. There happened to be no customers in sight at the moment, so, overcoming his natural shyness, he moved toward the man at the machine.

"Come along, mate," said the fellow, encouragingly. "You wor' st the springs, that's certain. Ninety

pounds," he ventured by way of prophecy, once he had run a hand over the customer's lean anatomy. "Step up now, and see how close I am."

Gordon complied — timidly, for eyes in the throng had begun to turn round now, yet submissively, for he had committed himself too far to recede.

The needle swung round slowly and after a few hesitating oscillations came to rest.

"Ninety-one pounds," the proprietor of the machine announced, in the loud tone again of the commercial spieler. "Only one pound out. A nickel — thank you. Next, ladies and gentlemen. I can size you all up, from ninety-one pounds of skin and bone to two hundred and fifty of solid brawn."

Ninety-one pounds of skin and bone! Gordon, quite flustered by having attracted so much attention, had slipped into the comparative obscurity of the crowd. But he had heard the taunt, and when a few minutes later he climbed onto the car for Los Angeles and took his seat in a quiet corner, it afforded him food for reflection.

Only ninety-one pounds in weight. Yet he knew that his height was close on five foot eleven, although the cobbler's stoop in his shoulders might make him look somewhat less tall. There was an ominous disparity between the two figures. He remembered the days when he weighed around 150, when his condition had been one of fine muscularity, without an ounce of superfluous fat to cumber his well-set-up frame. The loss of weight was the measure of the inroads which the lung trouble had already made upon his physical condition. Ninety-one pounds of skin and bone left

— he realized that the loss of a few pounds more must mean dissolution. He was neither depressed nor dismayed by the reflection. He was just glad that he had now the certain knowledge of the narrow margin of endurance upon which he could reckon.

The hour's ride to Los Angeles was a restful experience — he stepped down from the car with something of his old spryness and agility. Then he shouldered his swag, and passed from the depot to the street, encountering a throng of theatre patrons hurrying to catch the late cars for their homes in outlying towns. The lights, the stir and the bustle, pleased him. He seemed to be entering a new world, or re-entering an old world from which he had been long debarred by the bonds of slavery.

On foot, enjoying the slow leisurely walk, he made his way in the direction of the Southern Pacific railway station. There was no need to hurry; he already knew that no train would be available until the early hours of morning. One hand now held both the kit of tools and the strap of his bundle; the other hand, in the side pocket of his coat, rested on the ten little rolls of dimes in their canvas sack.

He was within a stone's throw of the station and approaching a cigar stand. The man behind the glass show-cases appeared to be a bluff, kindly sort of individual. Gordon, mustering up his courage, stopped before him.

"A five cent cigar, please," he asked diffidently, after depositing the grip on the sidewalk at his feet.

"What kind?"

The question was a poser; the would-be purchaser

had not smoked a cigar for ten years — the nomenclature of the different brands was out of his line.

"Oh, any kind — a mild one," he answered, depositing his nickel even before venturing to take a cigar from the box now proffered to him.

"Fine night," remarked the vendor, as he rung up the cash register by his side. "Some matches?" And taking the answer for granted, he passed over a little box of safeties.

Gordon was nervously toying with the unwonted cigar between finger and thumb, making as yet no show to light it. The man's friendly manner encouraged him to get to the real business he had in view.

"Would you mind changing some dimes for bills?" he asked, half apologetically, as he produced the money bag and laid three or four of the rolls on the counter.

For a moment the man behind the cigar boxes bestowed a close scrutiny upon the maker of this somewhat unusual request. It was nervousness, no doubt, that caused Marsh Gordon to cough. He turned aside his face, raised his lean fingers to his lips, and tried to repress the hollow sepulchral sound that issued. The cigar-merchant did not utter the words, but his eyes spoke them eloquently enough: "Poor old chap."

At last Gordon controlled the paroxysm. His swag had dropped onto the sidewalk beside the grip. He picked it up and readjusted it on his shoulder, tramp fashion. At the very moment the sound of railroad cars being shunted in the depot close by could be heard.

Again the eyes of the two men met.

"Going out on the desert?" asked the dealer in tobacco. "I would say that's the place for you — with

that bad cough," he added, softening the remark. "Oh, I've seen lots of chaps like you boarding the S. P. trains. And some of them come back all right. Now, how many dimes have you there?"

"I want to change ten dollars," replied Gordon, as he made up the indicated amount, placing the rolls side by side on the counter. "Don't think I've been robbing my kiddies' banks," he went on, with a grim but wistful smile. "I just did a little saving on my own account this way."

"Oh, that's all right," was the reply, as the dealer broke one of the rolls and counted the contents. Then he swept the other nine, uncounted, into a drawer, and, opening the cash register, produced a crisp ten-dollar bill. Gordon accepted it thankfully; he could have wished for assorted bills of smaller denominations, but was too diffident to give further trouble.

"You'll find the amount all right," he remarked. Then he folded the bill and bestowed it in a flat leather purse beside a couple of silver dollars.

"Oh, I'm not worrying about that. And here, mate, just have this cigar on me. Smoke my health some night under the stars." And Gordon, a trifle bewildered, found himself the possessor of a big rotund club-house — with a red and gold band — of a quality, he could guess, that only rich men could afford.

"I surely will," he answered, with the courteous dignity which the kindly gift deserved. "Good night, and thank you very much indeed."

Swag on shoulder, looking the tramp and feeling the tramp by now, he passed on his way toward the railway station. But he wondered. He knew that the

hardened hobo was in the habit of commandeering largesse, mostly in the form of meals. The voluntary generosity came as a surprise. No doubt it was the very thing he himself might have done had the positions been reversed. But this was not in his thoughts. He was just moved by such an unlooked for manifestation of sympathy and kindness — the sympathy and kindness which, if exercised generally, could make the whole world kin, the down-and-outer a brother to be succored, not hastily judged, spurned, and kicked aside.

The ticket office was still open, and he lost no time in purchasing with his remaining dimes and one of his dollars the ticket that would carry him a few hours later from the city of plenty to the verge of the desert wilderness. He took a seat in one corner of the spacious waiting room. He was wakeful, without any inclination to sleep, and as many nights perhaps without a bed were in view, he thought that the new experience might commence right now. There were others besides himself on the seats, awaiting trains with heads pillowed upon rolls of bedding swathed in canvas, evidently accustomed patrons of the Hotel of the Beautiful Star, as the French tramp gaily describes his sleeping quarters.

He happened to have taken a place near to the lunch counter room, and from this quarter, through the wide-open doors, there came wafted to the wanderer's nostrils the fragrance of coffee and of beef-steaks in process of cooking. Marsh Gordon, hitherto sustained by the excitement of his departure, began to feel hungry. He had the cold collation in his swag — chicken and rolls. But that he had designed as his first meal

on the morrow — out on the desert, with the food itself a tender reminder of his loved ones at home. No, he would not change from this intention. But he felt that he must eat now — should eat now. And the suggestive odors of a hot juicy steak were terribly inviting. He touched the bulging shape of the silver dollar in his purse, longingly, not in the spirit of the miser but in that of the reckless spender.

Well, in any case, he was a hobo now, free from all care or thought of the morrow. "Homeless, ragged, and tanned"— the song of the vagabond came back to memory. And in the mood of the song, he picked up his bundles and almost swaggered into the lunch room. Perching on one of the revolving stools, he bestowed a glance at the card of prices, then boldly ordered a sirloin, thick-cut and under-done, with coffee and cream for liquid accompaniment.

For years and years he had never so much enjoyed a meal. To his own surprise he ate it with hearty appetite, lingering over each delicious morsel, revelling in the mild stimulant of the piping-hot coffee. When he stepped out again into the waiting room he felt refreshed, restored, a changed man.

"No ninety-one pounds of mere skin and bone now," he muttered with a grim smile, as his eyes chanced to rest on a penny-in-the-slot weighing machine. "I've half a mind to see how much I've gained already."

But he restrained this ironical impulse, and settled himself once more in his chosen corner. He lit his five cent cigar, and, although unknowingly he was breaking the rules of the waiting room, at this late hour of night,

or rather early hour of morning, there was no one to gainsay the liberty he was taking.

Long, long ago he had given up the use of tobacco, for his wife's sake, ostensibly, because she had complained that the smoke got on her nerves, but really for the sake of increasing the domestic economies. He felt no such obligation now, and every whiff seemed to soothe and comfort him, not only mentally but physically as well. Of course he knew that the doctors would say that the smoke was a deadly irritant to his poor lungs. But he did not feel it that way, had not the slightest need to cough or expectorate, and smoked himself contentedly into a state of placid somnolence.

"All aboard for the San Bernardino Valley train!" It was the cry of a colored porter that woke him with a start to consciousness that the day had dawned and that his train was ready on the platform. He clambered aboard, and deliberately chose the smoking car — the car for all the fraternity of tramps, to which he now belonged.

CHAPTER XI

MIRIAM'S EMANCIPATION

IT was the day following the wedding. Everything had gone off splendidly. Bernice had looked her best — a charming bride. The bridegroom, handsome, debonair, yet duly impressed with the seriousness of the occasion, had shown to fine advantage. Little Bessie, as the flower maid in attendance on her sister, had won all hearts by her beauty and her winsome ways. The ceremony at the church had been attended by the best society in the town. At the wedding breakfast in the bungalow the chosen guests, a bevy of bright young people, had enjoyed themselves to the full. The health of the happy couple had been drunk in champagne, and they had been driven away in their beautiful new limousine amid showers of rice and old shoes. Miriam and Bessie had been carried off to a dinner and theatre party in Los Angeles, and it was close on midnight before they had returned home, tired but delighted at the close of a perfect day.

Despite the fatigue and excitement inseparable from so great an event, Miriam had risen at her accustomed hour. She had started Kioto on the breakfast preparations, and, peeping into Bessie's room to find the child still sound asleep, had resolved to allow an extra half-hour before waking her to dress for school.

Meanwhile she would fill up the time by straightening out her own apartment, where considerable confusion reigned. In one corner was a little heap of discarded wrapping papers, and garments were lying all around in odd places, quite contrary to the methodical habits usual with their owner.

Miriam was soon launched into the task of putting things away. She moved about leisurely, now hanging up a cloak in the closet, next folding a lace shawl and restoring it to its accustomed box perfumed with old lavender, dusting a little table here, settling a cushion there. At last, tossed onto the sofa, she encountered the long pair of white gloves which she had worn at the wedding. She picked them up, and began to pull out the fingers, finally neatly folding the gloves and wrapping them in tissue paper. Then she stepped over to the drawer of the dresser where gloves and handkerchiefs and ribbons were kept. Here, too, was considerable disorder, which she proceeded to rectify. Soon her fingers encountered something out of the ordinary, and she drew forth the letter that had been placed there for her finding. At a glance she recognized the handwriting on the envelope —" To my dear wife Miriam." Before springing open the lightly sealed cover, she guessed the nature of the contents.

" So he has really gone to the desert — just as I supposed when I found his bed undisturbed yesterday morning."

With these murmured words she settled herself comfortably in an easy chair, and then unfolded the epistle. Its length somewhat surprised her, also the key enclosed. But she let this last slip to her lap, where she

likewise placed the tiger-lily without as yet reading the inscription that accompanied it. Then she proceeded, calmly and deliberately, to read her husband's parting message.

The opening sentences left her equanimity still undisturbed, but when she reached the passage that revealed the secret of the hoarded money her lips parted, she uttered a little ejaculation of excitement, and sat bolt-upright in her chair. As she proceeded, a gleam of quiet satisfaction came into her eyes. Then, with recovered command of her emotions, she went on to the close.

"Well, that's all right — the very best thing that could have happened," was her comfortable reflection as she dropped the hand that held the letter. "He acted very sensibly indeed in going away quietly, without any fuss or tears or sentimental display. I like him all the better for that, and I'm sure I hope he will recover his health out on the desert, although any such result seems to me quite unbelievable. At all events one in his condition should not be among well people — he must have known the terrible risk we were all running by his presence here, Bernice and Bessie, not to speak of myself, whose good health has been so necessary for the sake of the dear girls. But to think of him having saved all that money! My word, I never dreamed before that he could have been such a miser. He never made it possible for *me* to put away a dime each day. And there have been times — many, many times — when fifty or a hundred dollars would have relieved me of no end of anxiety and made things quite different in the home. How often have I gone

without a new hat, or Bernice with a made-over frock. And he had that secret hoard in his trunk all the while. Goodness! Even after twenty and more years a wife keeps discovering new things about her husband. However, he saved the money — so far, so good. As he says, it will provide for me and Bessie for perhaps a year, and I'll be able to keep the Jap boy and settle down to my china painting in real earnest, without having to worry all the time."

While this train of thought was passing through her mind, she had folded the letter and replaced it in its envelope. She now took the tiger-lily in her hand, and read the words on the paper pinned to the stem.

"'For Memory!' Poor, impracticable Marsh! A sentimentalist all the time. If he had had less sentiment and more go-ahead energy, we would have been better off today."

Miriam had risen to her feet now. She laid the key of the trunk on a little table, covering it with the letter. Then she crossed the room, tore the scrap of paper into four, and tossed the fragments, together with the already wilted flower, among the rubbish in a corner of the room.

At this very moment Bessie, dressed for school, her eyes aflame with excitement, burst into the room.

"Mama, he hasn't come back yet. Last night he didn't sleep in his bed again."

"Your papa, child?" Miriam's voice came without a quiver. "Oh, you needn't worry about him. He has gone out on the desert, as I told you yesterday morning, to see if the dry air there won't do his cough good."

"And he went away without bidding me goodby," faltered the child, tears welling into her eyes.

"Oh, I've got a letter," replied Miriam, laying her hand on the envelope resting on the table. "He sends you his love, dear, also to Bernice, and hopes to be back soon, feeling strong and fit again."

"Poor, dear daddy — all alone," Bessie murmured, the big tears now rolling down her cheeks. "Can't I read his letter, mama?"

"No, my child," replied her mother with quiet decisiveness. "There are things in it intended only for me, as you can readily understand. But he tells me to give you his fond love, as I said, and just wanted not to distress you, and us all, when he slipped so quietly away. So there is no need whatever to be anxious about him. He'll get on fine in the dry desert air, and is to write us frequently. Now run away, Bessie, and tell Kioto to serve breakfast. I'll be through tidying up here in a few minutes."

Bessie had been trained to rules of strict obedience. She never dared to argue with her mother. So, with rueful countenance, she turned and went to do her bidding.

When Bessie had departed for school, and Kioto a little later had also taken himself off, Miriam visited her husband's room in the backyard. Her first act was to open the trunk, and after she had lifted out one of the sacks of dimes, and read the inscription on the tag, $100, she was content to run her hand over the eight others, leaving them undisturbed meanwhile. She had found the bags covered only by an old suit of clothes.

"My, but he was taking risks," she exclaimed, "hav-

ing all this money here. Really he was just as irresponsible as a child, and it was a child's trick to keep on hoarding dimes and never change them into currency, or better still deposit them in a savings bank at good interest. Now, what am I to do with all this small silver? Such an accumulation of chicken-feed I never heard of before. The bags together must weigh pounds and pounds. This one by itself is quite a load to carry — a thousand dimes."

She lifted the sack from the table. "Five or six pounds, certainly," she decided to herself. Then she sat down and reflected for a few minutes.

Presently her mind was made up. Carrying two bags at a time, she first of all transported the cash to the bungalow sitting-room. Then she telephoned for a taxi-cab, put on her hat and jacket, and, while waiting, studied the little bank passbook which she had taken from her bureau. Inscribed on the leather cover were the names of both husband and wife — Marsh Gordon and Miriam Gordon. The account had been a family one — a joint account against which either party could check.

"Well, in any case he never drew a check all the time we were married," said Miriam to herself, arriving at a decision. "So that will be all right. Besides he gave me the money — he does not want it for himself. And if he should chance to fall among bad companions, who knows but that he might be tempted to draw a check, perhaps a big one? Therefore it will be safer in my own name, for many reasons."

Satisfied on this point she was ready for the chauffeur, who had just announced his arrival by a toot on

his horn. She carefully superintended the man as he carried out the sacks of silver and placed them in the tonneau.

At the bank she owed no explanation — she gave none beyond the casual remark that the unusual quantity of dimes represented domestic economies over a considerable number of years. She received a temporary receipt — such a big operation in counting would have to be performed after regular bank hours. The new passbook would be ready for her next morning, and the new account be duly opened on the bank books in accordance with her instructions.

Miriam walked home. She was exhilarated by this unexpected access of wealth — permeated with a sense of well-satisfied independence. She felt assured now that she would be able to overcome all the final obstacles to her successful career as a painter on china. Before long her name would be quite famous and her artistic products in great demand. As she walked along the sea-front this thought delighted her. She was thankful, too, that she had got the bulky accumulation of silver safely and unobtrusively transferred to the bank — that she, solely and exclusively, held the secret of its possession, that neither Bernice nor Bessie knew anything about the matter. Then, what a consolation to think that there need be no more pinching and paring all the time to make things meet at each week's end!

Miriam Gordon, indeed, just like her husband, had at last been liberated from slavery. His renunciation had brought for her emancipation. The irony of it all

— unselfishness and selfishness had achieved the same end.

That very evening, with her masterful readiness for action, Miriam was able to effect another arrangement for her additional comfort at home. Her husband's spare clothes and small personal belongings were packed into the trunk that had been more than half empty after the removal of the silver. The trunk itself was consigned to the cellar of the bungalow. The Japanese boy, Kioto, assisted in these operations, prior to departure after his routine dish-washing duties.

Two hours later he returned with a push-cart which brought his own belongings, and he was duly installed in Marsh Gordon's room. As the equivalent of board and lodging Kioto was to give extra hours of service and do some of the laundry work besides. This would mean for Miriam, not only diminished laundry bills, but complete release from heavy household duties. For she had already trained Kioto to be quite a good cook, and the youth, like all his race, was only too keen to be entrusted with such additional responsibilities which in the end would insure advancement to the position and pay of a fully qualified culinary artist.

Altogether an ideal arrangement, reflected Miriam, as she crossed the yard after bidding Kioto good night. Bessie was already abed and asleep. Miriam felt that the child would resent the intrusion of Kioto into her father's room — that she would, in her childlike way, look upon the change as a sort of desecration. But Miriam would soon settle that. All through their lives she had tried to keep her daughters' minds free from

mawkish sentimentality. With Bernice she had succeeded admirably, and now she must take Bessie a little more strongly in hand.

The Japanese boy-student, now alone, surveyed his quarters with placid satisfaction. It was the well-filled rows of book shelves that had made the new proposal put forward by his mistress quite irresistible. Detailed examination resulted in his being specially attracted by a historical classic in twelve portly calf-bound tomes. He drew forth Volume I, and placed it on Marsh Gordon's reading stand.

So while the old occupant of the room was gaining fresh experiences in life under the desert stars, his youthful successor, not less studious in his tastes, was poring over the fascinating pages of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." Readers may depart or die, but books go on forever.

CHAPTER XII

THE BUZZARDS' ROOST

IT was high noon when Marsh Gordon descended from the railway train. He had so arranged his blanket roll and tool kit that he carried both together, slung from the walking stick across his shoulder. He looked around him inquiringly, to find himself in a small town nestled between two parallel ranges of hills. Behind him lay the rich fertile valley lands of Southern California. Beyond in the opposite direction ran the narrowing gorge through which the train was now puffing on its way toward the wilderness. .

This was not a desert town, for it was surrounded with orchards and fields of alfalfa, the vivid greenery of which betokened abundant water. Yet the air was desert air — hot, but crisp, dry, and exhilarating. Gordon breathed it deep down into his lungs with intense satisfaction; such an atmosphere was as balm to their lacerated tissues. He coughed just a little. But on the present occasion there was no paroxysm; rather his malady was simply taking note of changed and improved conditions.

He moved slowly along the main street, heading eastward, following the train. Most of the local men were clad simply in shirt and trousers, and the old shoe-pegger in his town clothes, coat and vest, collar

and tie, soft felt hat and nicely blackened shoes, looked quite a swell by contrast.

More than one passer-by gave him a pleasant "good day" to which he as cheerfully responded. But he proceeded on his leisurely way, for there was nothing in the town to detain him. He had his dinner in his swag, and, although he had not breakfasted, the sustaining influence of his beef-steak supper during the small hours still abided with him. So he was well content to saunter on for a few miles toward the goal of his pilgrimage, the desert beyond the narrow gorge. He would rest in some shady spot when he was tired, and eat when exercise and fresh air had given an edge to appetite.

The afternoon was well advanced when, all alone now, the cultivated fields changed to sage brush and cactus, he halted by a little irrigation ditch that crossed the roadway. Twenty or thirty yards up the stream was a clump of willow trees. Toward these he bent his steps, and sat down in the cool and umbrageous shelter. Everything was still and silent but for the ripple of the flowing waters and the gentle swish of the desiccated wind blowing in from the desert and rustling the foliage overhead.

Spreading his blanket on the sand and using the grip as a table, the wanderer partook of his first meal in the lonely wilderness. The cold chicken, rolls, and apples tasted fine, and for accompanying vintage there were copious cups from the ice-cold stream fed by mountain snows beyond the foothills. He was eating the home food, thinking tenderly of home, and hardly felt himself to be as yet the full-fledged hobo. He looked, too,

more like a gentle tramp, a refined and educated tramp, so that had there been fish in the brook and a rod in his hand he might have sat as a picture of some old-time Izaak Walton.

He lingered over the meal, then smoked the plump cigar which his friend at the tobacco stand had bestowed upon him. "A kind-hearted chap," he reflected as, according to the conditions of the gift, he pledged the health of the donor with appreciate whiffs of the fragrant weed from Havana. He bethought himself, too, that this would probably be his last indulgence of the kind for many a long day to come. A reserve fund of ten dollars would not run to two-bit cigars.

In the cool of the declining afternoon he resumed his journey — at an accelerated pace, for he felt wonderfully fit and well, and it would be advisable, too, to find some place of shelter for the night. He had read that the desert is always cold after sundown; even now in late July, after a day of grilling heat, he could feel a "bone" in the air that meant a chilly night to follow.

The shadows were falling when, ahead of him, he spied the lights of another little town, or rather a little cluster of shacks this time, grouped around a railroad siding. Here he would be able to get a cup of coffee and find some wind-protected corner where he could sleep wrapped in his blanket, his grip for pillow and the starry firmament for canopy. He was the vagabond now, and must play the full part, even though the memory of his narrow spring bed in the screened room at home caused a pang of wistfulness.

He passed one or two cottages and reached the sta-

tion buildings — a small waiting room and ticket office, a freight house with loading platform, beyond and at a little distance back, a row of antiquated railroad coaches transformed into dwelling places for Mexicans employed on keeping the road bed in repair. Everything was in darkness except for the signal railway lamps. But about a hundred yards further along there was a brightly burning log fire, with a group of figures squatted around. Here was warmth at all events, and he would be able to gain some information as to where he was and where a cup of coffee could be obtained.

Thus the guileless pilgrim came to find himself amid a gang of hoboes — regular road agents, among whom he looked as incongruous as a pigeon among crows. But they rose to welcome him, slapped him on the shoulder, and, when, somewhat taken aback at sight of their grimy unshaven visages and unkempt ragged garments, he would have beaten a hasty retreat, insisted on his staying and gave him a cosy place near to the camp fire built from old railroad ties.

"Make yourself comfortable, old scout," exclaimed one burly tough who was apparently the leader of the gang. "What's the news?"

"No news," replied Gordon, fairly bewildered and quite at a loss for a better answer.

"Well, you've just come in time, sporty," remarked another member of the band. "We were a-goin' to rush the growler."

"I don't understand."

"Oh, we know where we can get this here bucket filled with dago red in spite of all their damned prohi-

bition. And we was just chippin' in. Pass the hat, Bill. The old gent will cough up, sure."

Gordon gave a little cough in the proper meaning of the word, then politely answered: "Certainly, although I don't want to drink, I'll pay my share."

He reached to his hip pocket, and drew forth his purse. At the mere sight of it a buzz of eager expectation ran round. All the group bunched closer together.

"Guess you'll be good for a plunk," suggested the leader, craning forward with talon-like fingers ready, if necessary, to make a get-away grab for the spoil.

A genially smiling, smug looking, rotund individual held a battered hat right under Gordon's nose.

"Cough up, cough up," he said insistently, as if he was making a collection at a charity bazaar.

"I'm very sorry, but I'll have to ask you to change a ten-dollar bill," replied the victim of all this importunity.

"Bully, old rooster. Boys, it's a sawbuck!" cried the man with the bucket. "I'll fetch the booze and bring back the change."

"Thank you," and with a pleasant smile Gordon transferred the ten-dollar bill into his custody.

"Then Pedro and the Goat will go with you," said the leader. "That change will be too big a chunk of temptation for you to be luggin' around all alone, Dave, my son."

Dave swung the bucket and smiled with understanding. The three custodians of the ten-dollar bill and each other's honesty went off together, vanishing into the deepening obscurity of the night.

Gordon resumed his seat by the log-fire, perturbed by the unwonted companionship of such a crew of obvious ruffians, but making up his mind to bid them goodby just as soon as he received his change. He was unconscious of the hungry, avaricious eyes that were now fastened on his shoes and hat, and were even sizing up his garments. Some considerable time passed, but Gordon continued to warm his lean hands by the genial blaze and paid no heed to the muttered remarks around him.

At last the three who had gone to fetch the bucket of dago red were heard returning in the distance. They were jabbering away like three brothers who had already participated in at least a few libations while discharging their mission. Presently their forms were silhouetted as they came within the ring of radiance.

One of the group in waiting stirred up the fire by turning over and pushing together two of the burning railroad ties, causing a column of sparks to shoot upwards and cast a lurid glow over the surrounding growth of desert scrub.

"I say, boys," called out the boss, "why in hell don't you hurry up with the booze? You must think us an easy lot to let you fellows fill up while we're almost perishing for a drink."

"Keep your hair on," replied one of the two hoboes who carried the bucket between them. "You don't wish us to spill any of this here red ink, do you? And you don't suppose our friend with the blind pig let us go without standin' treat after we had bought a whole bucket of this stuff?"

"Bring me the change," said the boss.

"Sure," replied Dave, the cashier of the trio.

Gordon coughed behind his hand and rose to his feet. He approached the leader of the road agents, as much as to say: "I am ready for the little transaction to be closed." But the other had reached out his hand, and was now carefully counting the silver coins. After he had satisfied himself that the change was right, he calmly pocketed the whole amount.

"Sit down, man, sit down," he said, pointing to the log from which Gordon had arisen. "I'll attend to you presently. Boys, give our angel a drink of that dago red."

Gordon remained standing, and when an old battered meat can filled with the wine was pressed toward him for his acceptance drew back a pace or two.

"No, thanks," he said. "I very seldom touch liquor."

"So you won't drink with us?" demanded the cup bearer, in an angry, menacing tone. "Well, I'm not so damned pertic'lar." And he quaffed the contents of the can at a single draught, then glared again at the offender.

"If you ain't one of us," shouted the leader, "then who the hell are you anyhow? To begin with I'm going to swap coats with you, right now."

And before Gordon fully realized what was happening he found himself grabbed by the shoulders, his coat slipped over his arms, and a disreputable tattered substitute flung at his feet.

"And your shoes will just suit me, old sport," cried another rascal coming up from behind and pushing him down with a backward movement of a brawny arm.

"Yes, give me your shoes and do it P.D.Q. Do you know what that means?" While he asked the question the ruffian was removing the articles of footwear he had coveted.

"The waistcoat's for mine," piped a treble voice, as another pair of arms encircled the prostrate figure. "I ain't worn one for five years and this is a dandy."

Thus was Marsh Gordon, spick and span but an hour before, despoiled of his raiment, even to shirt and trousers, being left only his underwear, and this by way of favor at the peremptory demand of the leader of the gang. The latter had pounced upon the gun-metal watch before the abstractor of the waistcoat had got away with his particular share of the loot.

"Quit now, boys, damn you," shouted the boss. "We'll forgive the old bird the rest of his outfit. This here ticker was just what we was requiring." He held it to his ear to make sure it was a going concern.

"Excuse me," faltered Gordon, timidly. During the momentary respite he had staggered to his feet, presenting in his white undergarments a ludicrous yet pathetic figure. "Surely, gentlemen, you don't mean to take my watch?" he pleaded. "It was a gift to me from my wife."

This appeal only called forth guffaws of brutal laughter.

"Give us her address, and we'll see that the old lady gets it back again," cried one of the soulless villains.

"We'll take her your fond love," sniggered another.

"I guess the watch remains right here," said the

leader decisively, as he slipped it into the fob of his trousers.

"And my kit of tools?" asked Gordon anxiously, pointing to the grip resting beside the log on which he had recently been seated. Already his blanket roll had vanished.

Instantly half a dozen hands grabbed at the grip.

"'Pon my word, boys," observed the boss, watching the scuffle, "looks as if the old gent might be a bit of a road agent himself. A safe-breaking outfit, mebbe."

But even as the words were spoken the box burst asunder and its contents were scattered on the sand amid a bunch of eagerly clutching, grimy paws. Soon one man had possessed himself of a knife and was feeling its sharp edge with satisfaction, another of an awl that promised various utilities outside those for which the tool was primarily intended, while a third was laughingly holding up the shoe-pegging hammer with the remark: "Guess we can try our hand at prospecting, fellers."

"Only a little kit for mending shoes," protested Gordon in a broken voice.

"Well, these new shoes of yours won't get any mending tonight," replied the boss brutally, as he pointed to a pair of broken-down, short-length boots, of which even a mucker running a car in a mine would have been ashamed. "Pull them on, right now, darn your skin. And take your other duds as well. Hurry up, and get the hell out of here in double-quick time. Here, Pedro, pass me another mug of the dago red." He quaffed the contents of the can eagerly and went

on while poor Gordon struggled into the tattered garments. "Since you're too derned proud, Mr. High-falutin'-Man, to drink with us, we don't want to have you here any longer bumming around. You've made a hellish good trade for these clothes — you'll be passed along as one of us from now on. There's your lid"— with this he tossed him a disreputable looking old felt hat. "You'll need it on the desert. Now hoof it! Hit the trail, damn you!"

As he spoke the last words the ruffian, brandishing poor Gordon's own walking stick, pointed eastward along the railroad line.

Marsh Gordon was a brave man in spirit, but he realized too well that his ninety-odd pounds of skin and bone could not stand up against these ten or a dozen husky hoboes. Pleading he knew to be in vain, and further protesting would doubtless only lead to kicks and blows being added to the outrageous insults he had already been compelled to endure.

So perforce he obeyed — he hit the trail, leaving the miscreant gang to their orgies, craving rather the companionship of the coyotes howling lugubriously in the distance to that of the revolting buzzards in human guise into whose company he had so haplessly strayed.

Just as his lone figure merged into the darkness, a handful of shoe-pegs rained around him — like rice at a wedding, accompanied by a final ribald jest to which he shut his ears. With a great lump in his throat, stung to the heart by shame and sorrow, he blindly staggered on into the desert, which, up to an hour before, had been to him the promised land of so many day-dreams.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE DEPTHS

FOR the first few miles the road ran parallel with the railway, but thereafter, when a wide expanse of shifting sands had to be traversed, it diverged to the south, seeking the hard ground nearer to the foothills. Bewildered, distressed in mind, ashamed of the sorry spectacle which, he knew well, even in the black obscurity of a moonless night, he now presented, onward Marsh Gordon trudged, following the wagon tracks, neither knowing nor caring where he went.

The thought that kept ringing in his brain was — "Penniless! Robbed of the tools by which I might have earned a bed or a meal! My nakedness covered only by filthy rags! Even the blanket to shelter me gone! God above, was there ever a more complete wreck of humanity, a more hopeless down-and-outer than I now am?"

To this benumbing sense of desolation and utter degradation soon came physical fatigue. He stumbled now as he walked, although the moon had risen to guide his footsteps. Suddenly, after a bend in the road that rounded a spur from the foothills, he came upon a little patch of cultivation, with a good big haystack looming up on its farther margin. Toward this haven of rest he made his way.

On the shadowy side of the stack he nearly fell over

a slumbering cow. Bossy, rudely awakened, struggled to her feet and, with an indignant moo, ambled away to a little distance whence she surveyed the intruder anxiously, after a time it might seem almost pityingly.

Gordon's old farmer-boy experience in Iowa now stood him in good stead. He touched with his hand the stubbly ground on which the animal had been reposing — it was quite warm to his outspread palm. Gathering an armful of the sweet-smelling alfalfa he spread it on this precise patch, then brought further armfuls with which to cover himself. Thus was he provided with a snug couch, mattress and quilt complete, and within a very few minutes, utterly exhausted, the lonely one was asleep.

All through the night his sleep was a procession of dreams. He dreamed of home and Miriam and his children; then his wandering mind was away back in Creston, and he was once again both selling and soling shoes; next he was listening to the boom of the ocean at Venice-by-the-Sea; but out of the white surf came the repulsive forms of hoboes who flung their arms around him and, their leering faces close to his, began to strip him of his clothes. With a yell of fear he struggled to be free.

He awoke to consciousness, flinging the alfalfa from around him, springing to his feet, rubbing his dazed eyes. For the sun had arisen and its flashing light had momentarily dazzled him. When he returned to a sense of his surroundings, he looked to right and left, and then behind him.

There standing by the haystack, a small stool and a big pail in his hands, was a tall, broad-shouldered man

— evidently a rancher. He was surveying the extraordinary figure that had emerged from beneath the hay, in spellbound silence.

" Well, I'll be damned," he exclaimed. But surprise soon changed to hilarity, and he laughed aloud.

Gordon was dully conscious that he was the object of this explosive mirth. Instinctively he grabbed for his hat and jammed it down on his head as if thereby to give respectability to his appearance. But this added touch only served to accentuate the grotesqueness of the scare-crow figure, and the rancher laughed louder and longer than before.

Gathering his wits together, Gordon drew off the hat again and mournfully surveyed it. He remembered that the boss of the hoboes had called it a " lid." But any self-respecting pot or pan would have been ashamed of such a covering. It was greasy and mud-bedaubed, its tattered brim lopped like a rabbit's ears, its crown was ventilated by a hole as big as a dollar. The head gear dropped from trembling fingers.

" Well, of all the funniest dudes I ever clapped eyes on, you're the limit."

Gordon heard the softly drawled words. There was more of pity in them than of jest. Disconsolately he glanced down at his torn misfitting trousers, then holding forth his hands, surveyed the frayed streamers that were once the sleeves of a coat.

" I was stripped and robbed by hoboes last night," he stammered by way of explanation, his face a picture of shame and misery.

The last trace of merriment in the rancher's eyes died out.

"The dirty blackguards!" he exclaimed. In his tone and look were commingled anger and sympathy — anger for the calloused wretches who could rob an old man, sympathy for the victim of the dastardly deed. "They are vermin — simply vermin — and don't deserve to live. Oh, I've seen lots of them, but they know enough now to give my place a wide berth. The filthy swine!"

Again he was running an eye over the forlorn and tattered figure.

"I wasn't like this yesterday," said Gordon, with returning courage. "They held me up at their camp fire last night, and took my money, my blanket, even my clothes, my hat and shoes. I'm an honest man — I had my kit of cobbler's tools with me — that, too, is gone. See, look at my hands. I am accustomed to mend shoes — not exactly a noble profession perhaps, but one that is useful and I thought would assist me in paying for a meal should I be hungry and come up with a gentleman like yourself on his little farm."

And by way of testimony to the truth of the earnestly spoken words, Gordon held forth his fingers lined and blackened by the wax ends used in his trade.

The rancher nodded understandingly.

"Oh, in spite of your queer rig, old fellow, I knew you were not one of the hobo breed. Well, sit down on the hay for a quarter of an hour — or go back to bed if you prefer it" — the words were spoken with a grimly humorous smile — "until I milk my cow. Then I'll see what I can do for you."

The vagrant dropped down among the billowing hay, and watched in silence while his new-found friend ad-

vanced to the patiently standing cow, set down his stool, and adjusted his milk pail. The animal was a beautiful Jersey, white and brown, sleek-coated, mild-eyed, big-uddered. Gordon listened to the regular swish-swish of the descending stream. At last the operation was completed, and the rancher signalled to the homeless one to follow him.

"You can wash in that bucket," he said, pointing to the article in question, standing beside a water tank made of corrugated iron. "You'll find a towel and a cake of soap on the post. I'll cook some breakfast."

Gordon was left alone to his ablutions. He took off the coat he was wearing — he could hardly bring himself to think of it as *his* coat, although it was assuredly his only coat now. He shook it carefully, and tore off a few of the tatters. Then he bathed his face and arms and shoulders, and began to feel a little like his old self again.

"How do you like your eggs cooked?" called out the rancher from the doorway. "Fried on both sides or one eye open?"

"Both sides, please," replied the guest for breakfast, making his choice simply because he did not comprehend the alternative offer.

"Well, I'll be ready in a jiffy. Step right in."

Gordon responded to the hearty invitation, and, leaving the coat and apology for a hat outside, entered the little wooden building. There could be no fault found with his undershirt — it was spotlessly white, of good material, every button in place. At least from the waist-line up he once more looked presentable.

"Sit down," said his host, indicating a chair at the

table. "You see this is a one-room mansion — kitchen and parlor combined; I sleep outside in the open. I'm homesteading here. Got a quarter section running up into that little box-canyon behind. There's just enough water for a few head of stock and that patch of alfalfa where you dozed last night."

Gordon's reply or comment was checked by a cough that lasted a few moments. The host continued:

"Oh, I've sized up your trouble — they call it bugs round about here."

"Bugs!" Gordon managed to articulate, wonderingly.

"Yes, microbes, T.B.— name it which you choose. I'm a bit of a lunger myself. Used to be president of a national bank down in Kansas, but developed consumption there, and was recommended to try the desert. As the bank happened to go bust about the same time owing to a succession of bad years, that suited my book all right. So I raked together my few surviving dollars, and came here. And it has proved a mighty good place for me. No more hemorrhages, no more coughing, and the doctor says I'll be fit and well and permanently cured within another year. Then I guess I'll sell out, and move into one of the towns in California or Arizona."

"Go back to banking?"

"Perhaps. So if ever you see the name of Mike O'Meara in gold letters on a plate glass window, with the word President underneath it, you will know that's me."

"I'm glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. O'Meara," said the visitor, with a little bow. "In

present circumstances I feel ashamed to give you my name."

"Oh, well, we don't take much stock of names on the desert anyways. So don't you worry about that. Fall to, brother. You'll find that ham just fine, and there are your eggs fried on both sides according to order. Coffee? Here you are, and I'll be obliged if you help yourself to all the cream you can get away with. My old cow's a dandy, and keeps me well supplied. And when you taste those hot corn cakes you'll say I'm a dandy too — a dandy with the batter and griddle at all events."

Thus the genial and hospitable Irishman rambled on, putting his guest thoroughly at ease, encouraging him to eat and make himself at home. Gordon responded, for he was really weak from hunger, and the draughts of fresh milk which supplemented the coffee were like balm to his famished being. What with the plenteous feast and the kindly companionship all his woes were soon forgotten. At last he found himself smoking a brand-new corn-cob pipe presented to him by his host.

"Well," remarked O'Meara, puffing away at a big briar-root, "I've been figuring things out for you in my mind during breakfast. Sorry I can't present you with a pair of trousers; you would lose yourself in one of my legs, I'm thinking." The big burly Irishman laughed gently. "But you can take that Mexican straw hat — you'll look a bit better, and it's the finest thing possible for the sun. You had best make for Yuma now, where you can fix yourself up with a new outfit of tools, and will be able, no doubt, to pick up a few jobs to tide you along till you can get some

money from home. I'm going to hand you five dollars just for immediate requirements."

Gordon flushed and protested — he had never begged in all his lifetime.

"Well, who says you're begging now? Haven't I told you that I'm a banker and accustomed to make loans? I've learned to read faces, and yours is good enough security for me. And now, as to how to get to Yuma. It so happens,"— he glanced at his watch —"a wagon will be passing here in less than an hour's time. It is hauling furniture for a rancher who's a friend of mine down in the Imperial country, and is bringing out some canned stuff for me at the same time. So that will fit in with your plans fine. You can ride close on fifty miles of your way — two days' journey. Then, where the Imperial road branches off, take the railway track and you'll make Yuma in a few easy stages. Yuma will be a tip-top place for you — a year there will put that cough of yours to sleep, my friend. Now, I'm going to fix up a small supply of grub for you on the road, so that you'll be ready for Dan and his wagon. And I guess I can find you an old blanket as well."

Tears of gratitude welled into Gordon's eyes. But O'Meara only grew angry when any attempt to thank him was made. So the recipient of all his kindness lapsed into dutiful silence. What a change in his position, he reflected, within the passing of a single night!

From the lowermost depths he was beginning to climb again.

There was not only thankfulness, but renewed hope and courage in his heart, when an hour later Marsh

Gordon clambered up on to the seat beside the driver of the wagon, placed the obnoxious coat as a cushion to be sat upon for the present at all events, waved a final adieu to his generous host, and, his head protected by the most extraordinary hat he had ever seen, a tall cone-like structure of patterned straw in diversified colors, red, black, and yellow, started on his first stage into the blazing mid-day heat of the desert.

As the wagon moved into the quivering haze O'Meara was laughing once more.

"That Mexican hat makes him look rummier than ever. But he's a good sort all right. Poor old devil!"

"It's a mighty kind world after all," Gordon was murmuring to himself. The ruffianly hoboes were forgotten; the wrong had been blotted from memory and only the fragrance of kindness and hospitality remained.

CHAPTER XIV

A YOUTHFUL OPTIMIST

A PLACE with several notable points, was Submarine Junction. In the first instance, it was more than two hundred feet below the level of the sea, away down in the sink of the Great Desert of the Colorado River. Secondly, it was called a junction although it was not a junction, for the railroad running north to tap the fertile lands which border the mighty stream was as yet only in the surveyed stage of its existence. Then again it was reputed to be about the hottest place on earth in midsummer — if chickens survived until that season they laid hard-boiled eggs, so it was veraciously averred.

A sunbaked, wayside railway station, with the regulation agent's office, waiting room, goods shed and platform for handling freight, all on the most diminutive scale. But there were three huge round water tanks that were out of all proportion to the rest of the equipment and loomed as a landmark for a dozen miles around. The abundant water supply was required for the replenishment of the locomotives which from this point of lowest depression had to climb the heavy grades, east and west, across the arid wilderness. These storage tanks in turn were kept filled with water brought in tank cars from the Colorado River. So water was water in those parts, and was held in the

respect it deserved. But there was unavoidably some little wastage that just sufficed to keep alive a row of scraggy, diminutive palms which some audacious hand had transplanted from one of the canyons among the foothills on the far southern horizon.

Such was Submarine Junction. And here dwelt Ned Collier, alone, lord of all he surveyed, a gay and gallant youth of only eighteen, full of vim and energy despite the withering desert heat, proud of holding down his first job, that of station agent, filled with optimistic visions of the future when he would be promoted first of all as a train despatcher to Los Angeles, then to the executive offices in San Francisco, and finally to the exalted post of president of the entire railroad system. A happy, sanguine boy who was content to whistle if he felt lonely or, when the wire wasn't busy, jolly one of his brother telegraph operators along the line.

Ned was the son of a prominent attorney in Phœnix, Arizona. No name was better known throughout the state than that of Ledgerwood Collier, for the lawyer had spent a great deal of time and money in politics, his avowed ambition being the governorship, or, alternatively, a U. S. senatorship. Ned inherited his father's keen brain and active temperament. The young fellow had been graduated from high school with all the honors, had spent six months in qualifying himself as an expert telegraph operator, and had then promptly accepted the first position that offered.

Both father and mother had protested that life out on the desert, and more especially at Submarine Junction, most lonely and God-forsaken of all desert spots,

was not to be thought of. But Ned counted that he had his foot on the first rung of the ladder to success, and laughed at solitude, thermometers, tramps, coyotes, and rattlesnakes. He was thoroughly contented with himself, mightily pleased to have obtained a salaried appointment right at the start and by his own unaided efforts; and while city attractions might have their lure later on, for the present the desert and its free life, the daily duties to his hand, the sense of personal responsibility, the immunity from being bossed by anyone, also the monthly pay check, all looked good to the young Arizonan. No more courageous spirit ever held down a telegraph key.

The youthful station agent was fond of books, and between the scheduled hours of passing trains had plenty of time for reading them. He had also taken advantage of his position by homesteading one hundred and sixty acres close to the railway line, and had put up, mainly with his own hands, the modest little board shack that complied with the residential conditions of the law. There was talk of a high-line irrigation ditch being brought in before long. Therefore the land might prove of value some day, and meanwhile he had a place to call "home," also an abundance of occupation during off-duty hours in improving his property by vegetable gardening on the strictly limited scale rendered possible by a half-inch pipe that brought from over the way an occasional trickle of water from the overflow of the depot tanks.

But if the onion bed did not exceed a couple of square yards in area, and the tomato vines could be counted on the fingers of both hands, tomatoes and

onions that had to be so carefully wet-nursed to maturity were "some vegetables," as Ned was wont to declare when slicing them for the salad bowl. Moreover, their size and rapid growth proclaimed the fertility of his land — rich river silt that required only the magic touch of water to make it exude with productivity.

Thus the truck-gardening helped to pass the time in an interesting way, and Ned's life had grown to be quite a full one. For the desert is really lonely only to those who make it lonely; the companionship of work or books need leave no hour dull.

It was late afternoon, and Ned had just aroused himself from the siesta which the desert climate in summer time renders both agreeable and advisable. He was standing on the veranda of his little home, casting an eye at the railway office only a stone-throw away. He was debating with himself whether he would cross over and get ready the waybills for a wagon load of wool that had been brought in by a rancher from up the valley and was to be shipped out by an early morning freight train. Or would he take it easy yet awhile and perform his task in the cool of the evening? It wanted only an hour now of sundown.

To verify this estimate of the time he turned his eyes westward. There, coming along the railroad track, perhaps three or four hundred yards away, was the figure of a man. Not a hobo — the hobo sticks to a shady spot during the heat of the day. Most likely a Mexican, to judge by the hat he was wearing. But one thing was certain as the figure drew nearer — the

man was pretty nearly all in, for as he walked he reeled from side to side of the track like a drunken man. Ned was too experienced to imagine for a moment that the man was drunk — an inebriate could not have survived for an hour the torrid heat of the desert on such an afternoon. It was a case of thirst, that was clear.

And just as Ned had swiftly arrived at this conclusion the figure stumbled, fell prone, and remained where it had fallen. In a trice the young fellow had reached for the canvas water bag hanging at the doorway, and was sprinting for all he was worth across the sand and then along the ties.

Ned turned the figure over. The man was alive all right — just thoroughly exhausted, and in need of water too, for his first act was to raise his finger tips to parched lips. The rescuer lost no time in asking questions. He just lifted the sufferer's head, and supporting his shoulders held the water-bag to his mouth. A murmur of thankfulness mingled with the gulping of the grateful fluid.

A minute or two later the boy had the man upon his feet, and slipping an arm around his waist, was helping him along. He had carefully replaced the big conical Mexican hat on the wayfarer's head. The lean hands were again extended for the water-bag.

"No, that's enough for the present, old fellow. Oh, you'll have another drink later on. What you've got to do next is to get out of the sun. Why in the name of wild cats did you try to cross the desert in the daytime? You must be a pretty green hand. There now, steady. Stretch yourself out on this chair; let me fix

the pillow for you. Yes, here's more water now — in a tumbler this time. Feeling better, eh?"

These sentences had been interjected at intervals while stumbling footsteps were being guided from the tracks to the shack, until finally the rescued man had been placed upon a long rattan chair under the shade of the veranda.

"Thank you, kindly," the stranger at last managed to articulate. But he was too weak and fatigued for the present to say more. His eyes closed from weariness.

Ned gave him a little time longer to recover, remaining silent, cutting at his tobacco plug meanwhile and filling his pipe. Through the puffs of smoke he surveyed the recumbent figure. A down-and-outer, assuredly, to judge from the sparse and ragged garments — no coat or shirt, tattered breeches, and broken shoes. But not a dyed-in-the-wool hobo, for the bare arms were heat-blistered, not sun-browned — they had been white arms only a day or so before. And the face, although unshaven, was that of a clean liver — with clear-cut features, really quite intellectual looking with the high-domed brow. Ned, too, had no difficulty in guessing what the tall gaunt framework of bones really meant.

"Out for the desert cure, I suppose," he murmured to himself. "And by the Lord he nearly got it, good and plenty, for all time. He couldn't have made another hundred yards. A cup of tea is just about the right thing for him. If he gets a nap, too, so much the better."

Ned rose, and, moving on tiptoe, entered the cabin.

Within a minute he had the oil-stove alight and had filled a kettle of water from the big red earthenware *olla* standing in a corner of the room.

A little later the warm brew of tea revived the patient wonderfully. The stranger sat sideways on the long chair as he sipped the refreshing beverage. He smiled gratefully toward his host. Ned's first impressions were confirmed; he liked the old chap's face.

"You certainly saved my life," said the visitor. "I was almost done — it was a close call."

"Oh, you'd have made it, I guess, with the water tanks sticking up in front of you," replied Ned cheerfully. "But what beats me is how you came to be out on the desert without a canteen."

"I had a small canteen, which my friend the wagoner gave me at parting. But I emptied it, then lost it, together with the coat I was carrying over my arm."

"I understand. When a fellow gets thirsty on the desert his first impulse is to fling every superfluous thing away — there are cases, I'm told, where they have stripped themselves naked. But how did you come to hit the ties, anyway? You're no hobo."

"No; thank God, I'm not a hobo." The speaker drew himself proudly up, and there was supreme disgust and disdain on his quivering features as he spoke the words. "Yet, would you believe, my dear lad, until a few days ago I had succeeded in convincing myself that the hobo's lot is the ideal one? As the old song says: 'Homeless, ragged, and tanned, who so free in the land, who so contented'— as the tramp without a care to worry him?"

"So you tried the game?" grinned Ned.

"I came out onto the desert to try to recover my health. You can see what I am reduced to — mere skin and bone. I don't need to tell you my trouble. But many cases of tuberculosis have been cured by desert air, and I resolved to try the remedy."

"Then did you outfit as a hobo? Those trousers and shoes have all the earmarks of the tribe."

"No, sir. It was a gang of hoboes who outfitted me. The other night at a camp fire they robbed me of all my belongings — even stripped me of my clothes."

Ned uttered a low whistle of comprehension. The fist resting on his knee closed tightly. His eyes looked pityingly on the old man, whose lips were trembling now from the shame and humiliation of the memories invoked by the telling of his tale.

"The damned scoundrels!" muttered the youth. "But by the living God I'll get level with some of them for this. In future any brake-beam tourist my eyes light upon will take the sand trail from Submarine Junction on. I'll make this a railroad terminus for the dirty skunks, though up to now I've always felt inclined to pass 'em along."

The object of this mingled indignation and commiseration sipped his tea reflectively.

"Well, there are good men as well as bad men on the desert," was the quiet remark. "I've found that out already — am finding it out now, my kind young friend."

There was tremulous gratitude in the voice, a soft glow in the eyes that looked across at the boy who had succored and welcomed the wanderer.

"Good Lord, what I've done is nothing," objected Ned. "Do you think that I could have stood by and seen you perish? Besides what are people good for anyhow but to give each other the helping hand? I guess I was intended to do you a good turn — to help you out of your present troubles, old chap. And the present troubles are always the worst ones, aren't they? — although as a matter of fact yours don't amount to a hill of beans. I've got an old suit that will just fit you fine, and though I'd counted it past further wear you'll feel yourself in Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes as compared with your present togs. Your hat's all right — I'll say that much," he added reflectively, pointing to the conical headgear resting on the floor beside the chair. "Let me tell you that it probably saved your life, my friend."

"It was a gift to me from a kind-hearted rancher."

"Well, the rancher knew what was needed. You can't beat a Mexican straw hat out on the desert — or for the matter of that lots of other Mexican things, too — their *ollas, tortillas, frijoles,* even their *siestas.* Those old Spaniards certainly knew the whole game of eating, drinking, and sleeping — of living the life. Isn't that so?"

As he put the question, the boy leaned back in his chair, stuck his thumbs in his braces, and puffed out his chest complacently. *He* knew the life — *he* knew what he was talking about. Gesture and attitude spoke just as eloquently as words.

A faint little smile played upon the stranger's face.

"I am acquainted with the Spanish terms you have

used," he replied, "but I have not had much actual experience of the desert."

"Oh, well," laughed Ned, "I'll help you to plenty of experience, don't you worry. Gee, it's good to have you here — to have somebody worth while to speak to. I know right now that we're going to be great friends, Jim — regular pals."

The prospective pal raised his eyes in some surprise at the name bestowed, but the gay-hearted youngster gave no chance for interruption. He rattled on, volubly:

"Well, to get back to the clothes question. We had settled about the suit and O.K'd your hat. Next, as to shoes — you can have your pick from half-a-dozen pairs, Jim. You see I've always had a weakness for shoes, and keep myself well supplied. So after you've had a few days' rest you can hit the trail again in respectable style. I'll be able to get you a ride in the caboose of a freight. Oh, I've lots of friends among the train crews, old boy."

The thanks struggling to the stranger's lips were checked by an attack of coughing. He tried to smother it with his hand. Ned went on:

"But you've got to get rid of that cough of yours, Jim."

"Excuse me, my name is Marsh"— but the words were cut short by a renewed paroxysm.

"Jim Marshall — that sounds a good name," the boy replied. "Well, mine's Ned Collier. But it will be Jim and Ned for short — sort o' makes us pals from the start, eh? Well, Jim, you must be doggoned hun-

gry, I'm thinking. So if you just stretch out your legs again, shut your peepers, and have another little snooze, I'll be getting the supper ready."

"Can't I help?" suggested the visitor.

"Oh, your help will be called for later on, when the grub is ready. You're in luck, I can tell you. The westbound mail brought me a fine porterhouse steak this morning — from Yuma."

"That's where I am going."

"Well, it's here you're staying for the present at all events, Jim, my friend. There, make yourself comfortable. And here's a newspaper only one day old. Oh, don't thank me. The luck is mine. I can tell you I was beginning to feel so derned lonesome that sometimes I almost hollered aloud. So count yourself a welcome guest — welcome as the flowers in spring. I'll wake you fifteen minutes before supper-time so that you can have a wash. Perhaps also you'd like a shave. I can lend you a safety razor. My sweet little mother sent me one for a birthday present, but I stick to the good old-fashioned blade"— the mere boy looked very manly and consequential as he spoke the words. "No lawn mowers for me, thank you. But perhaps you, too, object, Jim."

"No, no," murmured Jim — the name seemed to fit all right now, for its owner attempted no further protest. "I'm accustomed to a safety razor."

"Well, that's good. I'll dig it up after I get the wood-stove alight. Grilled beefsteak, my boy — no frying on an oil-stove for such a rare luxury! So get your appetite ready. The sun's down, and it will be

fine and cool within an hour. Then we'll have a proper old yarn — after dinner, under the stars."

The joyous youth vanished. Marsh Gordon closed his eyes in restful thankfulness.

CHAPTER XV

REHABILITATION

PERHAPS an hour had passed. Jim — to give Marsh Gordon the new name his youthful host had so persistently fastened on him — had reposed, and occasionally dozed, on the veranda. Within the shack Ned had been busy over the mysteries of cooking. He never took such pains when he was alone. But to-night he seemed determined to impress his guest — all the resources of both his larder and his skill were being called into requisition.

When preliminary preparations were completed, and the cooking of the meal was proceeding automatically, Ned consulted his wardrobe, selected a suit that was partially worn but still more than serviceable, a khaki shirt of the regulation desert pattern, and a pair of shoes without flaw in their anatomy. To this little pile of clothing he added a towel and a cake of soap.

He peeped onto the veranda; his visitor was awake.

"See here, Jim," he said, advancing with the garments in his hand, "if you want a bath and a change before dinner, now's your chance. Oh, I can give you the finest shower you ever saw. Just step over to the depot, get under one of the water tanks, turn the spigot, and there you are. But take care to leave a little water for the Los Angeles Limited — it's due here

at 9:14 P. M. Go ahead, and don't be shy. There are no Peeping Toms in this wilderness. By the time you get back that porterhouse will be done to a turn. Or if you hurry up there will be time, too, for a shave."

The razor — yes, he was ready for Ned's despised "lawn-mower," and in the zeal of his regeneration he swept away not only the stubble that covered cheeks and chin but his mustache as well. He had never before ventured upon such an audacious alteration in his accustomed appearance. If he had sometimes thought of getting into line with modern ideas as to unnecessary hirsute adornments, the thought had been dismissed in favor of the conservative traditions of young days. But tonight he was free from all such trammels of habit, and lo and behold! when the safety razor had accomplished its full task he stood forth clean-shaven as an old-time Roman. As he looked into the mirror he himself was amazed at the result. The seemingly slight change had in reality amounted to a transformation. Marsh Gordon hardly recognized himself. "Jim" certainly seemed to be the appropriate new name from now onward.

The feeling of physical rehabilitation had a mental reaction as well. After all his miseries and humiliations self-respect was restored. Mike O'Meara's silver dollars jingled in his pocket — borrowed money, no doubt, but tangible and bestowing the confidence that comes from actual possession. It was with a glow of satisfaction that he took his place at the hospitable board.

Whereupon the gay-hearted lad proceeded to play the part of host. With his merry blue eyes, a wealth

of black curly hair, and cheeks tinged with the roses of perfect health, he indeed formed a striking contrast to his lean-visaged guest on the opposite side of the table.

But Jim's old haggard look was now gone. From his deep-set eyes there beamed a soft glow of thorough contentment. He ate with quiet appreciation of the good things provided, and at the same time listened with a happy smile to Ned's irrepressible flow of conversation.

From this he learned incidentally how the boy's mother contrived to keep the desert larder supplied with delicacies. The pumpkin pie had arrived from Phœnix the night before, together with a couple of dozen of fresh-laid eggs —" those beauties in the bowl over yonder." And there was a special turkey being fattened on the home place for Thanksgiving, which would arrive in due season stuffed, cooked, and ready for the table.

" You certainly have a kind, thoughtful mother," commented Jim.

" The best and dearest ever! " assented Ned enthusiastically. " And the dad's a rare good sport too. You know he's the top-notch lawyer in all Arizona. So the old man, of course, wanted me to get into the law business with him. But nothing doing! My mind had always been set on railroading. And do you know how I got my job here, Jim? Well, I just told the staff operator that I wasn't afraid of all the coyotes or wild cats or rattlesnakes in Southern California, and if he wanted a real unscalped brave to hold the fort at Submarine Junction and tap the keys between whiles, I was his Huckleberry."

Jim could not but laugh in unison — the boy's overflowing good spirits were irresistibly captivating. Here was a psychological problem presented. Was it not just such indomitable souls who were conquering the wilderness and transforming the grim desert into smiling farms and orchard lands?

"You are the very man for the job, Ned," he commented.

"That's just what I said — the very man"— the phrase appealed to him, and he patted his chest appreciatively. "So the job was mine, and I defy any operator on the line to get it away from me. There's just one danger, though. Promotion! It's sticking out its head from behind every Joshua tree on the desert. Oh, believe me, all the railroad bosses have at last got their eye on Ned Collier, from the president down. Then what will become of my 160-acre homestead? But, say, Jim, I've an idea. Why not stay on here? I'll teach you the Morse alphabet. Who knows but you might get my job when the management finds it can no longer do without me in Los Angeles or San Francisco?"

Jim smiled wistfully.

"I'm afraid that would be a big undertaking for a man of my years."

"Don't speak about years. A woman is just as old as she looks, but a man is only as old as he feels. And now I've a sort of hunch that this is the very climate for you, my friend. You haven't coughed once since we sat down to supper. Have you noticed that? Well, if you haven't, I have. And I'd bet you used to cough your head off most of the time."

Jim assented with a nod.

"That is true," he remarked. "I am already beginning to feel the good effects of the desert climate."

"Of course you do. That thorough baking you got today out in the sun will have done you no end of good in the long run. It's the sort of thing to paralyze the microbes in your lungs. From now you'll improve right along."

"Oh, I've made up my mind to get well, my dear boy," replied the invalid with a bright smile.

"Which is half the cure," exclaimed Ned, enthusiastically. "Now then, let me see." He consulted his watch. "I must go over to the station, Jim. The Los Angeles express will be here within fifteen minutes. She stops for water. Then I've some waybills to make out for an early freight in the morning. Would you like to step across? Will help to pass the time."

Jim surveyed the supper table, and a light came into his eye. "If you don't mind," he replied, "I think I'll wait for you here."

"All right, old chap. Have another rest — that's the best thing. But don't go to sleep. I've lots of more things to tell you tonight before we turn in. I haven't had a good old-fashioned yarn with anyone for a month past. So long, then. Have a look at my books. There's McClintock's 'History of Arizona'— just great — will interest you, sure. Make yourself at home."

But Marsh Gordon had other plans for the hour at his disposal. He merely glanced at the title page of the proffered volume, then replaced it on the bookshelf

for the present, at all events. He filled a big kettle with water, and put it on the stove, after replenishing the latter with a couple of small logs.

While waiting for the water to boil, he stepped onto the veranda. In the near distance now he could hear the rumble of the incoming train. As the big headlight swept forward, toward the very spot where Ned Collier had rescued him, he reflected that, had it not been for the providential succor that had reached him just as he was perishing from thirst, even now his body would be being ground to pieces under the big wheels. He shuddered at the thought. But it made the lad still dearer to him.

"God bless the boy," he murmured. "He has not only fed and clothed me but he has also restored to me my self-respect — given me a new hold on life, so to speak. Now I must see what I can do for him."

However, he lingered on the veranda yet awhile, watching the train as it pulled in, the big locomotives taking water from the tanks, and then the resumption of the throbbing journey up the steep eastward grade. The station was quiet once again, the whole place in darkness except for the gleam of the signal lamps and the glow of a light from the window of the little station office.

There Ned had settled down to his clerical duties. He was tapping cheerfully away at a typewriting machine, whistling at times while he filled up the official blanks with the descriptions and weights of the freight accumulated for dispatch in the morning.

At last his tasks were completed. He put out the light, locked the office door, and after a final survey

up and down the line started across the way for home.

Jim was not on the veranda, but the lamp was still alight in the living-room.

At the threshold Ned stood stock still from amazement.

"Jim!" was the only word he uttered.

The room was a marvel of neatness and orderliness, the debris of the meal all cleared away, every dish washed and restored to its proper place, pots and pans burnished and hung on the wall behind the stove, the stove itself polished as it had never been polished before, at least in Ned's days; even the wash cloth and drying towels had been rinsed out and were hung in a corner across a stretch of string.

The worker of all this change was in the act of rolling down his shirt sleeves, thankful that the job was finished before Ned's return, smiling a pleasant welcome home.

"Jim!" Ned again exclaimed. "You shouldn't have done all this, old boy."

"Could I have done less?" responded Jim, laying a hand on the lad's shoulder. "But for you, my dear Ned, the coyotes tonight would be picking my bones. And a mighty skimp meal," he laughed grimly. "Not much more than rags and bones. So even a coyote has at times its cruel disappointments, eh? Well, I managed to keep awake, you see. And now we'll have that promised yarn — under God's own bright stars."

NED RESCUES MARSH GORDON

CHAPTER XVI

REJUVENATION

"BY JOVE, I wouldn't have believed it's three whole months since you blew in, Jim. It seems more like three days."

The speaker was Ned Collier. Jim and he were in the office at the railway station. It was night. The lamp was alight. They were waiting for the passing of the eastward-bound express.

"The shortest three months in my whole existence," commented Jim. He was seated before a telegraph instrument, and was tapping away at the keys while he spoke, repeating again and again some special combination of dots and dashes. "And useful ones, too," Jim went on, "I really believe I'll be an expert operator before long."

"I'm certain of it, old boy. I never saw a quicker pupil. You're a wonder. The way you keep sticking to that Morse alphabet, you'll have every letter, sign, and symbol at the ends of your fingers before another three months have gone. You're sure the chap that put 'p' into 'pluck,' because you have got the right sort of pluck in you. And say, Jim, do you know I'm beginning to feel like a living fraud?"

"How's that?"

"Well, just look at this bunch of waybills you got

ready this afternoon. You're the station agent right now — I'm a sort of looker on."

"What nonsense! And don't forget how mighty kind you have been in teaching me all I know. I used to consider myself a down-and-outer before I came here, but I do believe I could hold a job now against a good few young fellows in the railway service."

"You bet, and give most of them points, too. And you know, Jim, you look a different man. What did you weigh before you came here?"

"Ninety-one pounds — of skin and bone," replied Jim, with a grim smile of reminiscence.

"Well, say, let's put you on the scales now, Jim." As Ned spoke he advanced to the open door. "Come along."

The other complied, and a minute later the two were in front of the scales on the freight platform. Ned, with the aid of a lantern, was adjusting the weights.

"Hop on," he said laconically when all was ready.

After sliding the movable weight a little distance, he raised the lantern and announced the result.

"One hundred and six pounds. Good for you, Jim. That's going some. Let's see — a gain of fifteen pounds in three months' time."

"It's wonderful," remarked Jim. "The desert has certainly proved my salvation."

"And you never cough now. Guess the hot air has just dried out those lungs of yours fine. You're as good as ever, sporty. Wait a moment now. I'll weigh myself, too. Around one hundred and thirty pounds, I reckon. Steady, there. By gosh, one hun-

dred and thirty-three. I'm piling on a pound or two myself every week, Jim."

"You're still growing, Ned. You'll be taller than I am by the time you're twenty. It will be you who will be having the high water pants when you come to wear a pair of mine, old man." With a laugh, Jim, raising a foot, surveyed the somewhat imperfectly clothed ankle.

"We'll have to get you a suit of tailor-mades," responded the boy merrily, "if you keep on increasing your waist line at the rate you're doing now. You'll be fat, positively fat, Jim, by Christmas. I'll have to put you into training — get your muscles hard as nails, like mine." He stretched forth his arms so as to display their well-developed biceps. "For myself, I don't want to be too tall. It's chest measurement that counts"— this as he folded his arms across his breast complacently. "I'm glad to be of the proper athletic build. Wait till I get to Los Angeles — I'm going to teach them a few things down there, how to tackle in football, for instance."

They had descended from the freight platform, and were moving back toward the office. Ned rambled on:

"But, gee whizz, that promotion's a bit long in coming, isn't it? I sometimes begin to fear the president of the road must have forgotten me."

"Or perhaps they can't find any one else capable of filling your shoes here, Ned," suggested his friend.

"That's possible — probable, too, when you come to think of it. There are not many candidates for the station agent's job at Submarine Junction, eh, Jim? But that's all right; I'm glad to be nursing it a while

for you, old boy. Only a little longer, and they won't be able to pass you over, that's a cinch. You already know all the ropes here, Jim. In fact, you're the only competent man I could name to take my place. When you've had just another thirty or sixty days' practice at the keys, I'm going to wake the bosses up, remind them that I'm in line for promotion, and at the same time insist on nominating my successor. That's the dope, Jim, both for you and for me. They'll be readier to let me out from here when they know you're on the spot to take over things. And that reminds me about the land."

They were again seated in the office by now and corn-cobs were alight.

"Why worry about the land?" asked Jim, as he tossed away the match he had been using. "Can't I look after it for you?"

"Impossible. If a homestead claim is vacated, it is lost — forfeited back to the government. The next fellow can jump in and take possession. But I've been studying up the law a bit. I can sign a relinquishment and the very moment it goes into the land office you can file on the quarter section. This won't give any interloper the chance to get in and cut you out. I would hate to see the land go to a stranger, Jim; for while it ain't worth a dollar an acre today, there's just the gambling chance that it will be worth something later on when the high-line canal comes in. But I'm beginning to doubt that project. Seems more remote than ever. Guess we'll both be in our graves, old chap, long before there is flowing water at Submarine."

"Oh, I'm not so sure about that. I've looked over

this country pretty thoroughly. I can see with half an eye that there are no real engineering difficulties. Then the soil is great — just great. It looks like sand but is really rich silt. With water it will be able to grow anything."

"No doubt. And without water it can grow nothing but sage and cactus. All the same, Jim, as I said before, it will be good to hold on to that 160-acre tract. I've half a mind to get one of the operators at San Bernardino to send me up a relinquishment form right now."

"Why the hurry?"

"Because who knows when I mayn't be hitting the trail, old scout? Oh, make no mistake. Los Angeles is a-calling me. Some fine morning they'll be waking up there to find that they can't run things any longer without the assistance of yours truly, Ned Collier. So it will be best to have matters fixed just right, well ahead of time. You'll have to run down to San Bernardino — that's where the Government Land offices are — deposit my relinquishment, and then get in your own filing without a minute's delay. Only a small fee to pay, and the thing's done."

"Well, but I'm going to insist that you remain half owner of the land."

"Nonsense!"

"Why nonsense?"

"First of all, there can be no collusion in taking up Government land. A relinquishment is a relinquishment — it must be for good, with no underground agreements. You're not going to catch me bucking the law against Uncle Sam, not on your sweet life, old boy,

even to gratify your generous whim. But apart from that, do you for a moment imagine, Jim, that I'm going to bother about such things when I get to Los Angeles — that I, Ned Collier, head train dispatcher and right in line for the president's chair, am going to worry over a miserable quarter section of desert scrub not worth in spot cash today a ten-dollar bill?"

The listener smiled, but did not interrupt. Ned went on:

"Besides it's only the fellow who sticks to the God-forsaken patch of wilderness that holds any rights at all. The place suits your health, pal; you say you're going to hold on after I leave if you get the station agent's job, and I'm going to see that you get it, that's a cinch. Oh, I've a bit of influence at headquarters, don't you forget it. So it's quite likely you'll be at Submarine for the next ten or a dozen years, and the high-line canal will surely be here by then. And, holy smoke, you'll have earned every acre of the land long before that time, out here in the sizzling heat. I'd like to know where any half interest for me would come in."

"That's how I regard it all the same," persisted Jim.

"Well, forget it, my boy. Hallo; here she comes at last." Ned rose, and was looking at his watch; far away could be heard the faint rumble of the incoming train. "Ten minutes late. That's mighty unusual. I'll try and get a newspaper, Jim. Then we'll hike for home."

Jim, true to the habits of a lifetime, began to straighten things in the office before locking up for

the night. Ned meanwhile had strolled onto the platform, lantern in hand.

Only a few minutes of delay for watering, and then the train had resumed its journey toward the east. The two comrades, again alone on the desert, sauntered across the narrow belt of scrub and sand.

When the lamp had been lit Ned's eyes glanced around.

"My word, Jim, what a difference you have made in this old shack," he remarked appreciatively. "Do you remember what a pig-sty it was when you first showed up here? Everything lying around — mud and dirt everywhere — half the dishes permanently unwashed — pots and pans a fright, the stove a nightmare. Now we might be having a lady housekeeper. A place for everything and everything in its place. I remember when first you uttered that dictum, old fellow. But certainly you've given me a few wrinkles. Never knew before how to twist a Sunday newspaper into a clothes hanger with a bit of string for the hook," Ned went on, laughing, as he hung his jacket on the indicated article of convenience.

"What's it to be tonight, Jim?" he resumed, seating himself on a chair. "Some reading aloud, eh? Shall we finish Byron's 'Prisoner of Chillon'? Or am I supposed to put in another hour's study over Brewster's 'Traffic and Traffic Management'? By jove, Jim, since you came here I've been able to do more solid reading in three months than I ever did before in three years. You're a veritable encyclopedia of knowledge, I've always said. Well, I'm fast

becoming at least an abridged edition, old boy — at least in my particular line. Can't teach me much about railroading, can they? Now I've read that row of technical volumes on the shelf, eh? Good biz! I guess I'll be able to give the bosses in Los Angeles some pointers. But there, I clean forgot the newspaper." On entering he had laid it down on the table, and now reached forth his hand. "This morning's date. Wonder how the old world is jogging along. Hallo! What's this? Picture on the front page — a good looking female, that. And her hubby's been eaten up by coyotes. Another desert tragedy."

He had unfolded the paper, and was glancing at the page. He continued to summarize the news for Jim's benefit.

"Up in Death Valley. The same old story. Death from thirst, and the coyotes to finish up things. His wife identified him by his coat and a little gun-metal watch with an inscription inside — M. G. from Miriam. But Miriam don't look very down-hearted all the same. Bit of an artist, with her palette and paint brushes. But, by Jove, the wee girl's pretty! Bessie Gordon, the dead man's younger daughter."

Jim had been listening dumbfounded and speechless, his muscles tense and taut, only his underlip quivering. But Ned did not notice his agitation. He had turned over the page, and was starting on another news item — something about the never-ending troubles in Mexico.

But Jim was not listening. He was thinking — thinking — thinking. So Marsh Gordon was dead — dead to his little old world at all events. He wanted

to read every word of the story. But he had now regained full command of himself — there must be no premature self-betrayal. A little later Ned would voluntarily relinquish the newspaper. The story could wait. So Jim, with face averted, waited too.

Ned at last was satisfied.

"No news worth a hang," he remarked as he tossed away the journal. "Guess I'll tackle Brewster."

He moved to the bookshelf and pulled forth one of the volumes from among the row of technical treatises.

"Then, if you don't mind," murmured Jim, "I'll light the lamp on the veranda and glance through the newspaper before I turn in."

"Liberty hall, old chap. Submarine Villa is all your own. But I expect you'll be asleep long before I, the studious one, have ceased from burning the midnight oil. So, good night, my dear Jim."

"Good night;" and Jim stole away, the newspaper clutched in his hand.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PASSING OF MARSH GORDON

WITH a dull, sickening feeling at the heart, Jim read every word of the newspaper story about the latest desert tragedy. He was oppressed by the thought that the end might have come to him — eaten by coyotes! — just as it had come to the unfortunate hobo who had been wearing his stolen coat and watch.

The body, or what remained of it, had been found at the southern end of Death Valley by a team making for Daggett. The man had obviously perished from thirst, and the coyotes had picked his bones — picked them with a thoroughness characteristic of the coyote tribe. What garments could be collected were brought in for identification purposes, together with the little gun-metal watch found in one of the pockets. The coat bore the label of a store in Creston, Iowa, a clue that eventually established its former ownership and the location of surviving relatives.

So when Mrs. Marsh Gordon, notified by the authorities, had come from Venice-by-the-Sea to Daggett, recognized the coat as the one worn by her husband when he left home three months previously, and exactly described the watch he was carrying, bearing his initials and her own name engraved within the case, the proof of Marsh Gordon's death on the desert had been held to be final and conclusive.

Here the tragedy part of the story ended. But there was a great deal more about the widow and her family — the recent marriage of Bernice to the brilliant young attorney, Burn Hopkins; the musical abilities of the younger daughter, Bessie; the high artistic attainments of the mother herself, whose china painting was already gaining for her a wide and rapidly extending reputation. Mrs. Marsh Gordon, formerly of Wellesley, Massachusetts — in this connection there was no reference to Creston, Iowa — was hailed as a distinct acquisition to art circles in Southern California, where already also she was interesting herself in social activities and taking a distinguished place as a leader of the higher culture. The picture reproduced with her kind permission showed the lady in her studio at Venice-by-the-Sea, and the smaller cuts were from recent photographs of her two charming young daughters.

The dead man read this long and voluminous appendix to his own brief obituary notice with growing feelings of repulsion and despair. The horror of it all was that this newspaper story must have been inspired, just as the photographs were supplied, by Miriam herself. Before the end of the article was reached the death of her husband had become a mere passing, or rather past, incident in her own brilliant artistic and social career. Indeed, while the words were not actually written, the general impression conveyed was that the death of Marsh Gordon, a hopelessly chronic invalid, although no doubt sad and painful in its circumstances, was to be considered in the light of a relief for the surviving members of his family.

"My God," he groaned aloud, as the newspaper dropped from his unnerved fingers, "and to think of my dear little Bessie having most probably read all this."

He arose, and in his agitation paced the veranda. He would die of shame now if Ned, having read the story, ever came to connect his new friend Jim Marshall with the Marsh Gordon who had passed on and whose memory was treated with such callous, almost contemptuous indifference. Better to remain dead than to be resurrected in such abominable and humiliating circumstances.

He wanted to be alone, to be out in the open, to think things well over while yet alone. So with a supreme effort he recovered his self-control, and, approaching the doorway, quietly and in his accustomed voice spoke a few words to his comrade within.

"Ned, old man, I'm going for a little walk — toward the foothills. No, no, don't disturb your studies. I won't be long gone."

The same thing had often happened before, so Ned paid no particular attention. Just to stretch his legs, however, he got up and came to the doorway.

"It's certainly a grand night for a walk, Jim," he called out to the figure already receding into the distance.

Turning round, his eye fell on the discarded newspaper. He picked it up, and glanced again at the pictures.

"Certainly, she's a bonnie wee thing," he murmured.

Then he re-entered the room, took a pair of scissors from the mantelshelf, and cut out the picture of little

Bessie, finally placing it as a book-marker in the volume on the table. A minute later he had resumed his reading and his note-taking.

The big nearly full moon had risen and was casting over the wilderness a flood of silvery radiance. Everything was very still, very peaceful, very beautiful, and as he walked along the peace and beauty of it all entered into Marsh Gordon's soul. The subtle brooding spirit of the mighty desert was around him, bringing solace and soothing to his troubled mind. The very silence seemed to be audible — a vanishing sound like the dying of a day or the outward ebbing of a night wind.

Onward he wandered, now picking a laborious way over billowing sand dunes, a few minutes later passing through a patch of weird-looking Joshuas, six or eight feet tall, with big naked top limbs that suggested orchard trees blasted and withered by lightning, until finally he reached the foothills where the scenery again changed, this time to huge boulders and slashed rocks and lofty battlemented ridges. Here he sat down to rest and commune with himself for a spell.

At first his thoughts were of a general nature. The mystery of life, the mysterious ways of Providence, overwhelmed him. Whence? Whither? Why? All were big points of interrogation. This was certain, that life leads through a strange country where no mile-post is passed the second time, where there may be green fields and fragrant flowers to cheer the wayfarer, or only barren wastes of sand and dwarfed scrub to chill his soul. The path traversed runs from an unknown point of departure to an unknown point

of arrival. Our coming, we believe, is from omnipotence, and therefore our going, we hope, is to immortality. Life is a season of probation — for purification or for deterioration — for the chiseling of a debit or a credit. As the flowers by the wayside give out their sweet perfume in unstinted abundance, so also should we let unmeasured gentleness and kindness radiate from us to all humanity. We pass this way only once, so that each life should strive by its sweet influences to make mankind conscious of its passing.

From lofty general thoughts Marsh Gordon came down to concrete facts in his own strange existence. Providence, destiny, kismet, fate — call it what you will — seemed to be working designedly for the obliteration of his former personality. Several times during the past three months he had been on the point of writing to Miriam, but something had always stayed his hand — the changing mood, waiting for assured good news about his health, and so on. Therefore in a measure he had contributed by his own neglect to the ghastly error of the wrong identification.

Now why should he thrust himself back into the life of the woman who was so obviously glad to be freed from the depressing burden of his presence? He was in no forgiving mood now toward her. It was the sense of personal pride that was rising in revolt within him — the personal pride that was coming back with improved health, restored vigor, and the consciousness of power to accomplish things despite his years and despite his past failures.

All right, let Miriam go her way, the way of her heart's desire, and he would go his way, his lonely way

through the wilderness that had now become for him home. Let her seek the artistic and social incense for which she craved — the career to which his presence could only prove a handicap and a hindrance. Let him turn to the achievement of practical things which he dimly sensed were coming to him even here, right in the solitude of the desert. Let Marsh Gordon pass. Let Jim Marshall, the new name fortuitously acquired, henceforth stand alone.

Such was the result of his self-communing. The resolve may have been a stern one, but the stern spirit of the desert had that night entered his soul. In the desert, cruel and remorseless, each living thing fights for individual existence — a hard fight of fangs and talons, spikes and spines. It was in this mood that Jim Marshall determined to face the future by himself.

"Kismet," he murmured as he rose to depart. "Well, let it go at that. Alone! Alone!"

From a little distance came the cry of a coyote, and glancing in its direction he caught sight of the creature peering at him, timidly yet eagerly, from behind a boulder. He had seen the same animal before, for it limped along on three feet and had evidently lost a paw in some steel trap. In fact on several occasions Jim had brought out scraps of meat and left them as a meal for this crippled denizen of the wild. But tonight he had forgotten — he had nothing to offer. And he felt sorry for the poor beast, showing that, despite the fighting spirit of the desert, a touch of kindliness, of thoughtfulness for others, still remained. Alone, yet not quite all alone!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PARTING

AGAIN the hands of time had moved on the dial — a few more months had glided by, peacefully and happily for the two devoted comrades out on the desert. But now the hour of parting was at hand.

It all happened one Monday morning. An official message came tapping and clicking over the wires notifying Ned that he had been promoted to the position of assistant train despatcher at Los Angeles, that by the end of the week his successor would arrive to take over the duties of station agent at Submarine, and that Ned would be expected to report for his new duties within three days thereafter.

Although the news had been long anticipated, in truth eagerly awaited, yet it came now almost as a blow. For promotion meant the severing of a companionship that had grown to be very dear both to Ned Collier and to Jim Marshall. At the thought the young lad heaved a deep sigh. Jim had often insisted that Ned had taught him many useful things — the handling of a telegraph instrument, the routine of a station agent's duties, and so on. But how much more had he learned in return from this dear old chum who had so strangely entered into his life, and had proved to be only a vagrant in disguise — in actual reality a

scholar, a widely read man, a thinker, a teacher with whom association amounted to a liberal education? During the all too brief months of association Ned had drunk deeply from the fountain of Jim's learning and philosophy. And now he was going to lose this best of all the friends he had ever yet made.

Jim's emotions were just the same. Despite the difference in years, this comradeship had also come to be for him like that of Damon and Pythias. The parting would be hard. But he tried to look cheerful as he warmly congratulated his young friend on the step in advancement which he so well deserved.

To Ned, too, the loss of the desert meant no small sacrifice. He had grown to love the great brooding wilderness in all its moods and aspects — its illimitable horizons, its vast sky of blue by day and its star-bedecked purpled canopy by night, its glorious sunrises and wonderful sunsets, its sublime peacefulness, its very solitude far away from all the petty worries and strivings of the crowded marts of men. He had become mentally acclimated to the power of silence, and to transplant him now was like the tearing up of delicate rootlets of habit and preference.

"Well, we must be men of action, Jim," exclaimed Ned. He had been sitting meditative awhile with austere knitted brows, but now he spoke with the forcefulness of a Napoleon. "When duty calls us to the fighting line, we've got to grab our guns, tighten our belts and go, old boy. Go — that's the word."

There was a lump in Jim's throat, and he did not seek to interrupt — he just huskily murmured: "Sure, sure."

Ned rose, and crossing over to his desk drew from a pigeon-hole a neatly folded legal paper.

"Here is my relinquishment to the land, Jim," he went on, "all fixed up. Tomorrow morning you will take the early train for San Bernardino, file this relinquishment, and then put on a new filing for yourself."

This procedure had been decided on long ago, so on the following morning Jim was on his way to the U. S. Land Office. By noon of the morrow he was back at Submarine. The two chums clasped hands as if the separation had been for a year instead of a day.

But Ned's face was bright with happiness when, the Overland having continued on its eastern way, he led Jim into the office.

"I've got great news for you, old scout," he exclaimed. "When you hear it you'll admit I'm some fixer. The moment you were gone I burned up the wires — got in touch first with division telegraphic headquarters at Yuma, was referred to Los Angeles, and then was switched back to Yuma again. And in the end everything came out right. You have been appointed station agent at Submarine Junction, and are to enter on your duties right away. The only drawback is that, seeing you are here and are already thoroughly familiar with the job, I am expected to take this afternoon's train and report at Los Angeles for duty tomorrow morning. So today we'll have our last meal together in the dear old desert home."

There was a tremor of sorrow in the young fellow's voice as once again he wrung his comrade's hand. Jim, overcome by the suddenness of the severance, was

too deeply moved to speak. He had a vague sense that he ought to be thanking Ned for the great service he had done in recommending him as his successor.

But both men knew what was in each other's hearts as they gripped hands and looked into each other's eyes.

"I've been busy since you went away," Ned resumed, dropping into his desk chair. "All the work is completed down to the minute — waybills and everything written up, books posted, and so on. So for the few remaining hours we have nothing to do but enjoy ourselves in an old-fashioned visit. I have dinner ready except to boil the coffee and broil a mighty fine steak I ordered specially from Yuma for the occasion. Let's go over to the shack now, Jim."

Arm in arm they crossed to the little home that would no longer be so called by the boy who had built it some two years before with his own hands, and to the shelter of which he had welcomed the stranger who had since become so close a friend. These thoughts were in both their minds as they sat down to the farewell meal. They ate sparingly and in comparative silence, although every now and then Ned did try valiantly to start and keep up a conversation in a small way. But the talk soon flickered out, with really nothing said. Their hearts were too full with the thought of the impending parting.

As the work of putting the little kitchen in order came to a close, Jim remarked:

"Ned, my dear boy, friends are not made but discovered, just as you discovered me and I discovered

you that day which seems so long ago, when you found me on the railroad ties perishing from thirst and almost at the end of my string."

"I subscribe to that," replied Ned, with attempted pleasantry in his voice. "It is very true. Friends are discovered. And when I discovered you, Jim Marshall, I found the best chap that ever lived."

As he spoke he prudently glanced at his watch.

"Only half an hour now until that old train comes wheeling in from the east. Let's go over to the office, Jim. Cheer up, old boy. We'll light our corn-cob pipes for the last time together for perhaps many moons, and ask over the wire if the Limited has left Cactus. We'll put up our heels on the desk, tilt our chairs, mix smoke and forget all sadness at our parting." Ned slapped Jim on the back goodnaturedly. "We are big men, old fellow, and strong men, and I'm going out into the world to conquer."

"Yes," responded Jim, laying an arm caressingly on the young man's shoulder, "you are going out to conquer and you will win big things — bigger than you dream of, Ned. I know it. You are the real stuff that makes successful men."

"Thanks for the compliment, Jim. Let us hope it is a prophecy. And I'll write you every week, old pal. It will be my Sunday morning recreation. You'll give me long letters in reply, won't you — tell me all your news, everything that happens at Submarine?"

"My news of society events in Submarine won't amount to much," smiled Jim. "But there will be lots of things to write you about all the same."

They had been smoking and chatting some time

when at last the distant rumble of the incoming train was heard. Ned jumped up and snapped together the lock of his handbag; his trunk was already on the truck outside, duly checked for Los Angeles; Jim took temporary possession of the grip resting on the office counter.

They were now standing together on the platform, watching the train as it swept down the grade to a palpitating halt in front of the depot. Each intended to say something more but neither spoke. Presently the fireman pulled the chain at the water tank to refill his locomotive, the conductor descended and came strolling along the platform.

Ned formally presented the new station agent to the conductor, although as man to man both already knew each other well. But the conductor had already heard the news, and had congratulations both for Ned on his promotion and for Jim on his appointment. He sort of sensed the situation, and soon passed on toward the mail car, leaving the friends again alone.

A little later the clanging of the bell gave the warning of " all aboard." The chums stood by the steps of the coach and clasped hands. Jim looked into the eyes of the noble young fellow whom he had learned to love as he would have loved a son had he been blessed with one; while Ned, although there were two big tears trickling down his cheeks, forced a laugh as he said:

" Goodby, pal, goodby."

Just the simple commonplace words of parting — nothing more!

It was with a determined air of resolution that Ned swung his grip and handbag onto the platform of the

already moving car and climbed up after them. A wave of the hand, the train glided on, and Jim Marshall was alone. He watched the little flags on the rearmost coach as they gradually and swiftly vanished into the distance. And soon even the throbbing of the locomotive also died away.

For a few moments Jim stood, grave and pensive. Then he pulled himself together, strode over to the office, sat down at the telegraph instrument, and sent a wire to division headquarters announcing that he had taken over his new duties. As "the man in charge" now, he felt a sense of his responsibilities. But his thoughts were also fuller than ever of gratitude for all the good things that had come his way — of yearning kindness toward those in sorry plight as he had once been, the poor and discouraged of the world, the down-and-outers needing often enough only a helping hand and the smile of encouragement to raise them from the depths and restore them to usefulness as he himself had been restored.

CHAPTER XIX

PATHS THAT MET

THREE years had passed. For over two years of this period Jim Marshall had continued to be the station agent at Submarine Junction. He enjoyed the reputation of being one of the most efficient employees on the railway, thoroughly familiar with all his duties, an expert telegraphist, reliable at all times, resourceful in emergencies, cool, capable, tactful, and respected by all with whom he came into contact. On two occasions he had been offered promotion, once to quite an important town within thirty miles of Los Angeles. But neither the professional advancement nor the increased pay had attracted him. The desert climate had bestowed on him recovered health and strength, and he stuck to it, also to his homestead of a hundred and sixty acres.

The latter he had wonderfully improved. Ned's rough and ready board shack had yielded place to a neat and trim three-roomed cottage, with a spacious screened porch for sleeping quarters. He had applied to the railroad company for some privileges in the matter of water, and with these accorded to him he soon had bright flowers around his home, also a vegetable patch of sufficient size to supply all his wants in this particular line. By taking advantage of the parcel post

and the frequent trains he obtained regular supplies of fresh meat, butter, eggs, and other provisions, so that canned goods were required only as an occasional stand-by, and did not constitute the regular diet to which most dwellers on the desert are compelled. Thus the place had proved for him nothing more nor less than an ideal sanitarium.

Under these conditions his cough had long since disappeared, the stoop had gone from his shoulders, his chest had expanded, his erstwhile lean, gaunt frame had taken to itself again the flesh that rounded out limbs and features, into his sun-browned cheeks had come the ruddy tinge of health, even his hair had recovered vitality so that scant grey locks had become replaced by a vigorous growth which might almost have been dignified by the name of pompadour. Altogether a wonderful transformation — one of those near-miracles which Nature, aided by the will-power and the temperament of the individual, is capable of performing even in desperate and well-nigh hopeless cases.

Physically Marsh Gordon had been to all intents and purposes reincarnated as Jim Marshall. Mentally the change was hardly less striking. The timid shrinking reserve of the chronic invalid had completely disappeared. It was no longer an apologetic hand that was raised to lips for the suppression of a coughing attack. Every gesture now was one of vigor and forcefulness, as many a hobo had come to divine long before getting within range of the fist that warned him to take himself away.

Then again, while Jim was still a great reader, he no longer shut himself up with books as formerly, con-

cealing his infirmity both from himself and from others in their companionship. He was always glad now to lay aside a volume when some teamster happened along or a rancher from up the river came in with a wagon-load of wool. Conversation with his fellow mortals, however commonplace, had come to have the preference over commune with the immortals of the printed page.

On such occasions Jim Marshall was the soul of hospitality. No rancher was ever allowed to start back for home without sharing a meal. The honest teamster passing by had never to ask for a cup of tea or coffee. And during a pleasant leisurely hour the news of the day would be discussed, crops and prospects, the latest settlements, the coming of the high-line irrigation canal, most likely — that will-o'-the-wisp project which was always about to happen yet never seemed to materialize. No one knew better than the alert-minded station agent the potential resources of the locality and the engineering requirements for their eventual development. He had not only gleaned his knowledge from hundreds of such conversations, but he had tramped the country over a wide radius all around, until he was acquainted with every contour of the land. And his faith was condensed in a favorite expression, one with which he ended most discussions on the topic: "Don't worry; the high-line canal will surely come."

The project meant much for Jim Marshall. He knew that its realization would make his choice quarter-section, close to the depot, the most valuable acreage anywhere near — in fact the inevitable townsite when water would bring an inrush of settlers to the rich silt

lands. He often looked over his holding, and frequently of an evening would walk from corner post to corner post. The location was ideal and guaranteed him double frontage on the main thoroughfare when Submarine Junction would be a town. Sc he had a "lead pipe cinch" on the locality, as Ned would have described it in his breezy style.

But Jim Marshall's thoughts were travelling far beyond Submarine. One of his most intimate friends was a rancher up the river, a Frenchman by birth, as his name indicated — Francois Lavigne. Jim had never applied for a holiday all through his period of service with the railway company, so, with no one to relieve him of his duties even for a single day, had not been able as yet to accept Lavigne's invitation to visit him at his home. But meanwhile, every time Lavigne paid the depot a call, bringing in wool or fetching away stores, the station agent sat at his feet, so to speak, and took full toll from his visitor's experiences of the rich stock-raising country away to the north among the foothills.

Lavigne's specialty was sheep. He had imported prize Rambouillet rams from his native France, and was reputed to have the highest-grade flocks in the West. He grew chiefly for wool, but every now and then had a few carloads of fat wethers for the mutton market. Thus Jim and he met quite often, and as the friendship progressed the hours of conversation grew more and more prolonged.

So, while he kept his own counsel all the time, Jim Marshall had plans far afield from Submarine Junction. The sale of his homestead would be only a step

toward the carrying into effect of these plans. Ready cash was the first desideratum — the absolutely indispensable thing indeed. For this he patiently awaited the coming of the high-line canal.

He was quite content to wait. Everything was going well with him in the meantime. There had been a good deal of new settlement along the river to the north during the last two or three years, so that there was more freight to handle and the day's tasks at the depot were considerably heavier. Then other ranchers besides Francois Lavigne had formed the habit of driving to the depot on the smallest possible excuse, so that a pleasant neighborly visit might be paid. Jim constituted the entire resident population of Submarine, but his personality was such that the place was rapidly acquiring, for the locality, almost the reputation of a tourist town. Therefore, with his books, too, to fall back upon, time never hung heavy on his hands.

But for Jim Marshall the happiest hour of all was on Monday nights, when the Los Angeles express came in and brought with unfailing regularity the weekly letter from his dear and faithful pal, Ned Collier. "His dear old pal"— that is how the old man invariably thought of the young boy who had rescued him from death, befriended him, fed and clothed him, restored him to health, courage, and ambition. Ned had come to be more to him than a son; he was a child of his very soul.

And this rare affection, this almost paradoxical attraction between two men so far apart in years, was not alone on Jim's side. Ned had fully reciprocated the feeling, as had been shown at the hour of parting

more than two years ago, and had been still more abundantly proved by the letters which ever since had been mailed each Sunday night, without a single break, to "the dear old boy" out on the desert. And with the letters came very frequently some token of friendship or some thoughtful little delicacy — it might be only a cream cheese or a can of tobacco, but a message from heart to heart all the same.

It was one particular Monday night. The express had gone through, and Jim had returned to the cottage bringing with him his usual newspaper, a small postal package, and, most important of all, Ned's regular letter, a generous epistle, as the fat envelope promised. Jim sat down in a leisurely way, prepared for a quiet, pleasant hour. The newspaper was laid aside with scant ceremony, but the package was first of all opened. It proved to be a carton containing five fine-looking cigars. Jim deliberately lingered to light one — it was just what Ned would have liked him to do. Puffing complacently he now at last applied himself to the letter — his weekly treat, to be enjoyed without interruption only after everything else had been attended to and there could be no possible interruption.

The epistle opened in an excited manner, but Jim read on placidly — he was accustomed to Ned's eruptive moods.

"My dear old boy:

"Listen, listen. Draw your chair closer. Come nearer to my ear. I'm going to whisper something to you in confidence. It will amaze you — take your breath away. That I, the heart-free, the love-proof,

the man not to be diverted from a great career by woman's wiles — that I should have succumbed. To think of it! How are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath nor proclaim it in the streets of Ascalon. And now to my confession."

Jim leaned back in his chair, smiled, took a few puffs at his cigar as if to prolong the pleasure of expectancy, then smiled again and resumed his reading.

"It all happened so suddenly, Jim. Like a thunderbolt from the blue — that's how the poets would describe it. We met at a party. I was introduced. She smiled at me — such a pretty dimpled smile from the prettiest dimpled face my eyes had ever looked upon. And in a moment I had lost my heart. Right there the old Ned Collier was a gonner."

For another full page of rhapsody the letter ran on, with praises of the beloved one's beauty, her divine singing, her superb piano-playing. Jim still smiled, indulgently, quite undisturbed. But all of a sudden he started — sat bolt-upright in his chair. His lips were eagerly parted now, his breath came quicker, while he read:

"Her name is Bessie Gordon. A pretty name, isn't it? Not quite sixteen yet — sweet sixteen. So of course I'll have to wait a year or two or maybe longer. But Bessie is worth waiting for, Jim. I would wait ten years, and worship at her feet all the time. If she's to be my Rachel, I'm her Jacob — that's a cinch, old boy."

Jim dropped the hand that held the letter. Into his face came a glow of great joy. He murmured aloud: "Oh, dear God, to think that these two may be united — the two beings I love best in all the world. Jim, my dear old pal; Bessie, my wee sweet maid. Dear God, I thank you."

For a moment he remained, gazing in front of him. Then he raised the letter again.

"But say, Jim, isn't it curious? No doubt, you have forgotten that name. But I remember it. Bessie Gordon — the daughter of that poor old fellow we read about in the newspaper, who died of thirst in Death Valley and was eaten up by coyotes. You mayn't know that I cut her picture out of the newspaper that night, and have it still. I showed it to her the second time we met. She blushed a bit — of course I discreetly hinted that she was obviously my fate. But I speedily changed the subject. There were great big tears in her eyes — she was thinking of her lost dad.

"I consoled her, Jim — nothing like consoling to put the love stuff over, old boy. Oh, I'm tumbling to the game, although of course as yet I've got to be mighty careful in my approaches.

"But joking apart, Jim, you can take it from me, that I'm in dead earnest. Bessie is the sweetest little girl in all the world, and I only loved her all the more when she pulled out from her belt a little gun-metal watch — you remember the watch in the newspaper story, Jim, with the inscription inside? — and held it up before me. 'It was my dear daddy's watch,' she said, 'and every time I put it to my ear like this, I just

feel that, even though he is dead, he is sending me a loving message.' She was crying again, Jim, and hang it all I'll allow I was almost blubbering, too — to think of it, I, Ned Collier, the man of iron who used to be the terror of all the hoboes this side of Yuma. However, a pretty girl in sorrow makes a lot of difference, don't it, pal?"

But Ned, had he been present, would have found that Jim also had been moved to tears. Shoulders heaved convulsively as he leaned forward, his face buried against an outstretched arm. It was several minutes before he sufficiently recovered from his emotion to complete perusal of the letter.

The closing paragraphs, however, were in different style. Ned had gradually descended to prosaic matter-of-fact details. He was to visit at the Gordon bungalow at Venice-by-the-Sea next Sunday afternoon. He was rather scared of the mother — looked like a bit of a tartar. And he had heard her laughingly declare that no girl should think of marrying a man with less than $5000 a year.

"I'm dead sure she kind of meant the remark as a warning to me. So you see, Jim, I'll have to get busy — that's about the salary, I should think, of a private secretary to the President, and the very job I've my eye on. But to get there I'll have to climb over the corpses of a thousand rival candidates. So it must be hustle from now on. No more time to write long Sunday letters, eh? But, gee, I feel good now that I've unbosomed myself to you, Jim. It's great to be alive when

a fellow has even a chance of winning such a girl as Bessie Gordon. Them's my sentiments, and here's my hand across the miles — good night.

"Your old chum,

"NED.

"P. S.— Hope you'll survive my new brand of cigars. They'll be a day's change from the corn-cob anyway."

Jim had reached the last word. He folded the letter, and replaced it in the envelope. Then he leaned forward, hands clasped upon his knees, weighing everything over in his mind. There might be complications ahead. Yet he was well content. Destiny was weaving in her mysterious loom. But love between Ned and Bessie could only be a thread of purest gold to enrich and glorify the wondrous fabric.

CHAPTER XX

THE OPENING WAY

LIFE for Miriam Gordon had its full measure of activities, yet through them all she preserved wonderfully her placid and even temperament. Her position as president of a leading woman's club gave her the public recognition that often means so much for those pursuing an artistic career. Her painted porcelains were not yet in great demand, nor did they command the prices which she deemed to be their due. However, they were on display in the leading art stores in Los Angeles, they were a prominent feature at local exhibitions and bazaars, and the newspapers had bestowed quite a number of flattering encomiums. The making of a name is always a matter of time, and she cheerfully accepted this necessary condition to ultimate success.

Miriam was essentially the thrifty type of woman, one who kept tight hold of every coin, even the smallest, and looked at it several times before deciding to part from it. All her pursuits were tempered by the strictest ideas of domestic economy. Her only extravagance was in clothes, but these she counted simply as an expenditure to capital account, sure of making immediate and adequate returns. Partly to add to her earnings, partly for the sake of further advertisement, and partly also with a view to extend her social circle,

she now gave private lessons in china painting at her own home in Venice-by-the-Sea, where she had installed a furnace so that every process of the art could be learned by her pupils. She also conducted select classes twice a week at a fashionable art institute in the wealthy city of Pasadena.

Her progress had been such that she had felt justified in tearing down the old screened sleeping room in the backyard and replacing it by an elegantly designed and finely equipped studio. Among the rich furnishings of this miniature temple of art was a grand piano — being purchased on the installment plan, although the world at large was not supposed to know this.

Here Miriam taught, Bessie practiced her singing and piano-forte playing, and occasional receptions and concerts were held. Bernice and her husband attended these, and reciprocated with similar gatherings in their own beautiful Los Angeles home. Therefore Miriam felt herself quite in the social swim and on the assured way to still greater triumphs.

There was one perplexity in her life, but after a while she had ceased to bother about it and had brought her mind quietly to accept the situation that had evolved. About a year after her husband's death there had come to her address a typewritten envelope containing a twenty-dollar bill, but without any accompanying words to explain why, whence, or by whom it had been sent. At first she thought an accidental omission had been made, and waited for the relative communication to follow. But a month later, when a second envelope of identical pattern and again bearing her typewritten address arrived, to her great surprise

once more it brought a twenty-dollar bill, again without explanation of any kind. And thereafter, month after month with unfailing regularity, the same mysterious remittance reached her hands. The only postmark on the envelope was that of the Sunset Overland Mail, so that the benefactor, whoever he might be, was obviously taking elaborate precautions to conceal his identity, for such a letter might be posted on the mail train at any stopping-place between New Orleans and Pasadena without its exact place of departure being revealed.

For a time she puzzled over the strange affair, but ultimately reasoned it out to her own satisfaction. Southern California is the home of rich people, many of them patrons of art. No doubt, some one acquainted with her story — how she had been left a widow in slender circumstances — had adopted this delicate method of lending her a helping hand. The direct offer of assistance would have been impossible, so the cloak of anonymity had been resorted to.

Therefore with her accustomed equanimity Miriam had long since left the question alone and had come to treat the monthly contribution to her resources as a routine incident. It was most welcome, for it helped to pay for Bessie's pianoforte and vocal lessons, giving the child the advantage of having for her teachers professors of the highest standing, one of them indeed of almost a national reputation. Providence was certainly very kind, but Miriam kept her thankfulness strictly within her own bosom, neither Bessie nor Bernice being told anything about this particular manifestation of its protecting care.

"The inaudible and noiseless foot of time" was still moving along. Bessie was now sixteen years of age, and, like many girls in Southern California, despite tender years was quite a young woman in appearance and in mental poise. The promise of rare beauty in girlhood days had been amply fulfilled. The golden locks were somewhat darker now, but their curls framed a bright pretty face with red lips that could smile as winsomely as ever and blue eyes that could be tender or merry as their owner willed.

She attended high school, where she specialized in musical studies, supplementing these by the private lessons from her professors. Ned Collier, the bright young railroad official, had come to be a frequent visitor at the home. Although love had as yet not been openly spoken, from the first there had been some potent attraction, some subtle bond of sympathy, between the youthful pair. Ned's weekly confidences to his "dear old pal" on the desert told the story of his ever waxing devotion, but if his eyes could have only seen a little diary that Bessie kept sacredly for herself and herself alone his heart would have leapt at the knowledge that she too had been touched by the divine fire of love.

Mrs. Miriam Gordon's "evenings-at-home" were invariably fixed for Friday, and had now become quite a fashionable institution, attended by notables from Los Angeles, Hollywood, Pasadena, and even farther afield. While most of the other guests had their luxurious automobiles, Ned Collier invariably came down by the modest interurban car. But he looked well in all the glory of the *de regle* evening dress, and had

established himself as such a popular favorite that, returning citywards, he was rarely without a seat in one of the more fashionable vehicles. Miriam could not fail to observe that the young Arizonan, the only son of parents socially distinguished in their own state, although poor perhaps as regards salary now, had an undoubted future before him. Therefore, while she carefully shepherded Bessie from any and all premature love entanglements, she in no wise discouraged the handsome, ardent, and most pleasing youth.

With his natural shrewdness, drawn also by genuine attraction, Ned cultivated the friendship of Burn Hopkins. The same spirit of buoyant optimism permeated both young men, and when Ned would laughingly forecast his coming lofty position as a railway magnate he would at the same time condescendingly promise Burn a job some day as one of the attorneys for the road. Burn Hopkins would gaily respond, and Bernice in her queenly serenity would smile too. Thus it came about that Ned occasionally dined at the attorney's house, and was accepted as one of the intimates in the entire family circle.

Therefore as each weekly letter went out to the still fondly cherished chum of desert days, it carried to Jim Marshall a full budget of news about all those still so very dear to the latter's heart. At first Jim was inclined to feel that the time had come when he should reveal his identity. But that thought soon passed. He had no right to disclose himself — what was he yet but a mere desert rat, an humble station agent earning $45 per month? Miriam was doing splendidly — far better than when he, the invalid shoe-pegger, was pres-

ent as an incubus on her shoulders, a handicap to her ambitious plans. All his admiration for the quietly masterful woman returned. But it was his obvious duty sternly to repress any reawakening tenderness of the old love.

Not yet, assuredly not yet — neither for her sake nor for his. He, too, had his world to conquer, also the individual freedom, which he realized had made a man of him at last, jealously to preserve. His mind was obsessed by a great scheme, based on knowledge garnered through Francois Lavigne, awaiting for fruition only the coming of the high-line irrigation canal. There must be no weak turning away now from the long, straight furrow which vision had already drawn — a furrow leading to a personal victory for himself that would at the proper time show to Miriam, to Bessie, to Bernice, to all the world that, although Marsh Gordon had by the very burden of domesticity once become a down-and-outer, he was no failure, but a man, every inch a man, an achiever of big things, a veritable empire-builder it might even prove. Then might come reunion and repose. Meanwhile there must be action, with the free unfettered hand.

And at this thought, alone on the desert, he would sing aloud, robustly now, for with recovered health the voice of his youth had returned, not despondently as of yore but with the ring of assured triumph in the tune:

On the other side of Jordan,
In the sweet fields of Eden,
Where the tree of life is blooming,
There is rest for me.

The geography of the hymn had somehow changed. His Jordan, his Eden, the tree of life were no longer necessarily attainable only through the Valley of Death. And in this buoyant mood he would sing the refrain again and again.

Thus hummed Jim Marshall one early morning as he was busy over some waybills for an incoming freight. At the close of his task he rose to stretch his limbs and bestow a glance up and down the line. This done, he gazed long and lingeringly toward the northern foothills mantled in the delicate heliotrope of dawn, one of Nature's art masterpieces which never failed to delight his soul. Then he turned around and cast his eyes across the unbroken expanse of desert to the south.

Away in the distance, silhouetted against the sky-line, to the southeast where the mighty Colorado River lay, was the figure of a man peeping over a tripod. Close by stood a covered wagon, its team unhitched and feeding at the pole. Further back were three or four other men, driving stakes in the wake of the surveyor and his instrument, and looking still closer, he discovered a flagman far in advance toward whom the man at the tripod was sighting.

Jim stood motionless, impassive and indifferent, it might seem, in the splendid discipline of his nerves. But there was the flash of joy in his eyes, a vibrant note of triumph in his voice, as he quietly murmured: "At last — the high-line canal."

CHAPTER XXI

PLANS AHEAD

WITHIN a month Submarine Junction was the center of a busy scene. The surveying crew had passed, and following in its wake had come the actual builders of the irrigation channel, with their teams and wagons, their ditch-digging machines and grading scrapers, their rock crushers and cement outfits, their small army of laborers with sleeping and mess tents, together with piles of baled hay for mules and horses, and stacks of provisions for the men. A sort of battlefield scene, and in some of its aspects a real battle — the conquering of the thirsty, hungry wilderness by man's indomitable energies guided by experience and inspired by far-seeing vision.

Jim Marshall was a quiet observer of all that was going on, Francois Lavigne also manifested great interest, and paid Jim frequent visits, sometimes for a couple of days, sharing Jim's hospitality and sleeping overnight on the veranda of the cottage. On occasion the Frenchman would bring down a bottle of rare old vintage claret, the finest produced in his beloved home land, and after dinner the two friends would talk over certain ulterior plans, sometimes far into the small hours of the night.

The Lavigne ranch that lay some twenty miles away

up the Colorado River extended to close on a couple of thousand acres, patented land, consolidated from the holdings of the original homesteaders who had sold out after proving up their properties and securing full title to their acreages. These homesteaders had quitted for various reasons. Some had never been really fitted for life in the wilderness, had tired of its loneliness, and had eagerly embraced the first opportunity that offered to sell out and return to the more congenial life of city or town. Others had been disappointed in their hopes, for a local irrigation scheme had come to grief through lack of funds and there had been insufficient water for the alfalfa crops that had been reckoned on as a mainstay. Yet a third class were the speculators who deliberately use the homestead laws as a means to secure, by a few years of penance, title to land which will be a salable asset after the minimum of required improvements has been made and closer settlement has enhanced values throughout the district as a whole.

The Frenchman was an ideal settler, for he possessed sufficient capital to hold on, unlimited stores of contentment and patience, also shrewd foresight as to possible future developments. He had bided his time, bought adjacent holdings when he could, and so gradually acquired his considerable and valuable property. In all this he had been aided by his good wife Hortense, the typical peasant woman of France who laughs at solitude, treats the allurements of city life with indifference, and makes actual possession of the soil the be-all and end-all of human happiness.

The Lavignes had prospered, but the full measure of their prosperity had been denied to them because of the

inadequate water supply for their land. Its productivity and earning power would have been greatly enhanced had the local irrigation project not ended in failure. It was this very question that some time ago had appealed to Jim Marshall's imagination and had ever since occupied his busy brain.

One night he and Lavigne were together, and were for the tenth time or more studying a map of the district.

"See, here is where the channel was abandoned," the Frenchman was explaining, his finger pointing to a pencilled cross on the map, "just four and a half miles from my boundary line. The lateral ditch must come through the Reilly-Burke land, and if these men had been in sheep like myself instead of cattle, or if they had shown a more friendly and neighborly disposition, all my troubles might have been solved years ago. But they are the most damnably cantankerous couple ever a man was up against, so I've been powerless all this time."

Jim nodded understandingly; he was already familiar with the situation, but invariably allowed Lavigne to voice his grievances anew when it seemed to give him comfort so to do. He turned to his bookshelves, and drew forth a treatise dealing with the laws of water rights in the State of California. It looked, as it had really come to be, a well-thumbed volume. Jim opened it at a turned-down page.

"Well, Francois," he said, "I went over the law again last night, and am quite sure that with the combined acreage we can secure undisputed title to every inch of that water. In all riparian rights the underly-

ing principle is first come first served, and absolute ownership of all water profitably employed. See here, the section is perfectly plain." He read aloud one of the numbered articles of the statute to which he was referring, then laid the book face-down on the table. "So it just comes to this," he went on, returning to the map, "that these cattlemen must be bought out, lock, stock, and barrel."

Lavigne had lifted the book and was re-reading the article. Here and there were carefully underscored lines.

"You have become a great lawyer, Jim," he remarked, raising his eyes and bestowing an admiring smile. "And to think that you have found time to read all these big books," he continued, pointing with the bowl of his pipe to a row of portly calf-bound volumes on the shelf.

The volumes indicated were the standard treatises for every law student and every practising attorney — Blackstone, Kent's Commentaries, Parsons on Contracts, and so on.

"Well, you see," replied Jim with a grin, "it was just these blamed tangled-up water right laws of California that more than two years ago set me reading law in a general sort of way. And I had not the faintest idea that it was such mighty interesting reading, I can tell you. But Ned kept sending me along the books, one at a time."

"Ned — and what's the latest news from him?"

"Getting along fine. Assistant superintendent in the freight department. That's going some, isn't it? and Ned still little more than a boy."

"Oh, he was keen and bright and wide-awake all the time. That young fellow was bound to get on."

"Bet your life," assented Jim emphatically, as he reached for the tobacco jar and began to fill his pipe. "The best boy that ever lived, Francois — that's what Ned Collier is. You know how he put me on my feet and helped me along?"

"You certainly needed a bit of feeding-up," laughed the Frenchman, "when you first struck Submarine. Looked as if a whiff of wind would have blown you off your feet, eh, my friend? I've never seen such a change in a man in all my life."

Jim smiled complacently. "It would need something of a cyclone to budge me these days. Well, Francois, you get busy now with both Reilly and Burke. You say they are still at outs?"

"The one hasn't a good word to say for the other. Yet they live under the same roof. I told you how they built their home, didn't I?"

Jim nodded, but Francois went on:

"You see, they made adjoining desert filings, 320 acres each, and for company's sake put the log house up right across the common boundary line. It's just one big long building — forty feet long, I'd reckon. And the one half is on Reilly's land, the other on Burke's — both Irishmen, as you'll know from the names. Each man has his bed at his own particular end, so that from the first they complied with the law by sleeping on their own holdings. But the fireplace is right in the middle, and now, though they're partners as regards the cattle running on the hills in the back country, they hate each other like poison, yet can't keep

warm on cold nights without being close together, which means scrapping all the time. Jolly partners! Ho, ho!"

The Frenchman was chuckling. Jim, too, laughed as he pictured the scene.

"And all about home rule?" queried the latter.

"That was the beginning of the quarrel, they say. You see even out of Ireland there are rival factions, and in this case two Irishmen are sufficient to keep up the fighting."

"You're friends with both?"

"I'm friends with neither. But when I come across Reilly alone we may exchange a word, or I may say 'good day' to Burke if it is he I chance to meet — which is more civility than they show each other, even though they are in partnership. If an offer came along they would sell out quick enough. But it must be to an outsider — they wouldn't sell to each other, not for all the money in the world. If one was left in possession, some night the other would be shooting at the log house before a week went past."

"A nice team to run a cattle ranch and share the same home," remarked Jim, drily. "However, as you said from the first, Francois, that's just my opportunity. I have now pretty accurately in my mind all the details. Their joint filings under the Desert Act were for 640 acres, and they got their cowboys to act as dummies for 640 acres more, making two square miles in all."

Francois nodded assent, and Jim continued:

"And without any muster you know pretty nearly the number of stock they are running."

"I know the number better than they do themselves," affirmed the Frenchman.

"Well, these are the two factors to fix the buying out price. But at this stage it will be best for me to leave the matter entirely in your hands. You can get next to Reilly and Burke without setting their cupidity on fire or making them go up in the air as to selling terms. Try them out separately, and get a figure from each so that when I throw out an offer they'll be likely to jump at it. Cash down, remember — I'm going to have the spot cash to lay on the table. That's the way to rope in fellows like these every time."

"But your own land — you haven't sold your own land yet, Jim."

"Don't worry about that. I had a wire today instructing me to be on the lookout for a special train due tomorrow about noon."

"Officials of the line?"

"No, sir. A special train filled with land-boomers and town-builders — so the private word was tipped me by an operator along the line. Well, they can start no boom here without my land, that's a cinch. You say you will be in Yuma Saturday?"

The Frenchman nodded assent.

"Then kindly fetch me out a strip of leather, about so long. I'm going to make myself a money belt — have just taken a fancy to sew it with my own hands, for old time's sake, Francois."

Lavigne did not understand the last allusion, but he promised to bring the leather along, together with sundry tools and furnishings that would ensure the job being a good one.

CHAPTER XXII

DESERT COMBERS

THE trainload of town-builders and land-boomers duly arrived — a motley assemblage, young men, middle-aged men, and old men, together with a sprinkling of women whose eagerness in the hunt for speculative lots or acres was even more keen than in the case of the masculine members of the party. When the special had glided down the grade and been sidetracked at the switch, they spread themselves over the landscape like a swarm of locusts.

Lavigne had remained with Jim to take in the spectacle. The two men stood together in front of the depot office, watching the scene and reading the signs. The whole thing was very strange and new to Jim Marshall, but he shrewdly sized up the situation.

"These are not real settlers — just a bunch of speculators. But I suppose that's the way the booming of a town begins."

"Sure," assented Lavigne. "Money has to come in first, for streets have to be laid out and graded, blocks subdivided, and so on. First the land agent's office goes up, next the storekeeper arrives, then a hotel; a lumber yard sprouts overnight, soon a bank blossoms forth, and your town is on the map for all time."

"Or until the bubble bursts," laughed Jim. "But

there will be no bubble this time," he went on, decisively. "Now that the high-line canal has come, the land round about here can be made an oasis in the desert. Besides don't forget, Francois, my friend, that Submarine Junction is going to be a real railroad junction at last."

"That's what I want. The cross line from Needles will help me — it will add a hundred per cent to the value of my land — and yours too, Jim; I mean the Reilly-Burke acres."

"Well, I've got to get them first. But I'm not worrying. They are coming my way, I feel assured. There must be no delay, however, or those Irishmen will be waking up to the fact that the booming of Submarine eventually means the booming of the river lands as well."

While he spoke his eyes were fixed on a group of three men who were standing just beyond the depot. One of them had opened up a map, which was being carefully examined.

"Look at those fellows, Francois," Jim went on, directing his companion's attention. "I should say they represent the business brains of the entire outfit. See, they are pointing in the direction of the cross line survey. And now, just as I expected, they are coming along here. They are going to pump the station agent for information."

Jim's surmise was quite correct, for when the party had approached and exchanged a preliminary "good-day," the very first question asked was where exactly the survey for the branch line to the north ran.

"You are the station agent, I presume," added the

spokesman of the trio, an elderly man, addressing Jim. He had correctly differentiated between the latter's work-a-day shirt sleeves and the rancher's somewhat more elaborate costume.

"That's what I am," assented Jim.

"Then you know about the proposed cross line?"

"Certainly. If you cast your eye just to the left of that bunch of mesquite you'll see the survey stakes. They run due north from there, as you'll observe."

Out came the map again, and its details were eagerly consulted. Whispered words were exchanged among the party.

Again the spokesman addressed an inquiry. He pointed to the only habitation in sight.

"I suppose you live in that cottage?"

"Right once more," smiled Jim.

"Then it is on railroad land?"

"No, sir. The railroad owns no land here except the tracks and the depot."

"Not your own house, is it?"

"Guess it's mine all right. I homesteaded 160 acres when I took my job here three years ago."

Swift looks of surprise were exchanged among the trio.

"May I ask how your land lies?" was the next query.

"Step this way," replied Jim, moving clear of the station building. "From this point you can see my four corner posts. Two, east and west, close to the railroad tracks; the others to the south there, just this side of the high-line canal survey stakes." He pointed in the indicated directions.

"So the main thoroughfare of any town must go right through your land?" exclaimed the inquirer, almost incredulously.

"That's so."

"Well, it looks as if the whole place belonged to you." The speaker turned to his friends, a rasp of irritation in his tone.

"Just as I figured," grinned Jim, "when I made my filing."

"Here's a pretty complication."

Jim overheard the *sotto voce* remark addressed to the other two members of the party. Again a private confabulation followed. The homesteader turned indifferently to his friend, as he drew a corn-cob pipe from his hip-pocket.

"Got any tobacco, Mr. Lavigne. Mine's in the office."

The rancher produced a little sack.

"Help yourself, Mr. Marshall."

Both smiled imperceptibly. They were not accustomed to this ceremonious style of address.

Meanwhile the map was being yet once again carefully scrutinized, and tiny crosses were being pencilled, showing approximately the four corners of the homestead acreage.

"A God-forsaken place this, ain't it?" observed the youngest of the trio, as he folded the paper and returned it to his pocket. His remark was addressed generally to the two local men.

"Oh, not so bad," replied Lavigne. "With the high-line canal here, it will be as good as Imperial before another year."

"Perhaps," interjected the leader of the party, with a dubious shake of his head. "If a town comes to be built, it may be so. But without a town land around here will continue to be of mighty small account. I suppose you would relinquish your holding for a small sum?"— this to Jim.

"What do you call a small sum?" queried the latter.

"Oh, say $10 an acre."

Jim smiled.

"We would also pay for your improvements — the cottage over there," suggested the young fellow with the map.

"I reckon you have to bid again, gentlemen," was Jim's dry rejoinder.

"Well, what's your figure anyhow?"

"Land in the Imperial Valley brings $500 per acre." prompted Lavigne.

"Poof! This is not Imperial," said the leader.

The words came contemptuously, while the speaker with studied nonchalance drew a cigar from his waistcoat pocket and bit off its tip.

"No, it is better than Imperial," said Jim quickly. "This is going to be the S. P. railroad junction for all the rich river lands between here and Needles."

"And a rich agricultural section itself, too," added Lavigne.

"Oh, I see how you are figuring," retorted the stranger. "It is always the same. Just so soon as capital shows its willingness to come in and build a town, the local people put a price on their Joshuas and their jack rabbits as if they were orange trees and fat beeves. The old hold-up game; I've been up against

it a score of times. Well, boys, I guess we'll be moving along "— this to his comrades. "Submarine don't impress me as a townsite proposition anyways. How soon can our train start?" he went on, again turning to the station agent.

"The line is clear just now right to Yuma, I believe," Jim answered. "But I'll telegraph and make sure. The next siding is at Cactus, twenty miles along."

"Well, I guess we'll have a look at Cactus," replied the other, as he struck a match and lit his cigar.

Jim had already stalked away to his office, from which a moment later could be faintly heard the tap, tap of the telegraph keys.

The trio were in close consultation. Lavigne made no attempt to listen. But he stood his ground, awaiting Jim's return.

At last the spokesman turned to the rancher.

"Do you know his price? Guess he is trying to bluff us when he talks about this damned patch of desert being equal to Imperial."

"I don't know his price," Lavigne replied. "But I guess he doesn't want to sell. He'll be able to patent his land now in a very short time."

"Are you ranching here?" The question was put affably.

"About twenty miles to the north, near the river. This is the station to which I bring my wool and my fat sheep for the Los Angeles market. Great market, Los Angeles. Growing all the time."

"That's where we come from. But one acre near

Los Angeles is worth two hundred acres in this devil's garden of sage and greasewood."

"Then why don't you stay at home?" asked Lavigne, with a merry twinkle in his eye.

The question remained unanswered. Jim was returning.

"Line clear to Cactus," he announced. "You can tell your conductor to pull out right now. If you stay longer you may be held up till midnight."

"Heaven forbid! Go over, Brown, and get the engineer to toot his whistle. Guess the bunch have had about enough of this attractive seaside resort. Submarine Junction! Sand Dune Park would have been a fitter name." He laughed at his own sarcastic pleasantry.

The individual addressed as Brown started off toward the switch. The leader and the young man with the map remained.

"Well, Mr. Marshall," said the former—"Mr. Marshall is your name, I believe?" He spoke now in a pleasant and conciliatory tone.

"Jim Marshall," assented the owner of the name.

"You haven't given us your figure yet."

"You didn't wait to get it. You flew off the handle with your talk about a hold-up game."

"Oh, pardon me. I was a bit taken by surprise when your friend tried to compare this place with Imperial. While I have no intention of buying here, all the same I'd like to know the price you put upon your land."

"Two hundred dollars per acre," replied Jim,

quietly. "Spot cash. Currency — I don't want to be troubled with any check. Out here checks are not in my line."

"What? Thirty-two thousand dollars for a desert homestead! Preposterous! Absurd!" The old rasp in the voice returned; the words rang with unfeigned, if chagrined, surprise.

"Not a desert homestead now," smiled back the land-holder. "The site of a railroad junction town. And in any case worth more than $200 to me when the high-line canal is completed and I can bring my acreage under cultivation.

The locomotive whistle sounded three prolonged blasts, and the crowd began to scurry toward the siding from all points of the compass.

"Good day," said Jim. "I've got to pass along your train."

He departed for his office. The two strangers nodded goodby to Lavigne, and moved off, slowly and half reluctantly, for the cars. They were talking earnestly to each other as they walked along. Lavigne watched them with a smile upon his sun-browned countenance.

Soon the train was loaded with its passengers. The station agent was giving some final instructions to the conductor. The young man who carried the map in his pocket descended again, hurried along the line of cars, and drew Jim aside.

"Would you be prepared to take $100 per acre?" he asked.

"Not on your life," was the decisive reply. "My price is fixed."

"Then will you give me an option for a couple of months?"

"Not for a couple of days. First come, first served, my friend."

As he spoke he waved a signalling hand to the conductor, and the latter in turn signalled to the engineer leaning out of his cab. The locomotive bell clanged, the couplings creaked, and the car wheels began slowly to revolve.

"There's my card," said the departing stranger. "If you change your mind send me a wire."

"There will be no wire," responded Jim with a meaning smile. "Perhaps you'll find Cactus more to your liking anyhow."

"All aboard," cried the conductor peremptorily; and the last of the land-boomers scrambled on to a car.

Jim for a moment watched the departing train. Then he glanced at the card. It almost dropped from his fingers when he read the name:

BURN HOPKINS
Attorney-at-Law
Los Angeles

But he quickly recovered his equanimity.

"By Jove, that's funny," he murmured. "That we should meet at last — and here."

Lavigne strolled up.

"Nothing doing, eh?"

"Mebbe so, mebbe the other way about," replied Jim. But don't forget that bit of leather from Yuma, Francois. I want it here by Monday next. I kind o' fancy I'll have a use for it before very long."

"Then it's home for me now," replied the rancher, as he moved toward his wagon, standing all ready hitched on the shady side of the freight house.

He had soon climbed onto the box seat and was holding the reins in his hand. Pausing for a moment to look over the landscape, Francois exclaimed:

"I say, Jim, who knows but this will be a big city one of these days?"

"Yes," replied Jim, "who knows — who knows? It takes men to build cities, and that man Burn Hopkins and his associates look like very forceful fellows. Perhaps, Francois, you remember the old verse that runs like this:

Cities are not great except as men may make them;
Men are not great, except they do and dare.
Yet cities, like men, have destinies that take them —
That bear them on, not knowing why, nor where.

"Very good," laughed Francois, as he shook the reins and clucked to his horses. "Very good indeed, Jim. But if they pay you the price, why, tuck it away in the leather belt which I will surely bring you on my next trip here."

CHAPTER XXIII

JIM'S FIRST DEAL

DAY followed day in ordinary routine. Lavigne had brought the leather, together with buckle, studs, eyelet rims, and the necessary tools. So Jim Marshall had been able to devote his leisure hours to the fashioning of a money belt that might have earned a prize for skilled workmanship. It was strong, supple, and finely sewn, and, as it gave no sign of its real purpose, he began to wear it, just to get accustomed to its use, as he laughingly told himself. For he felt convinced that, surely as dawn follows night, the filling of the belt was now only a matter of a little time.

So he experienced no surprise when one night there swung down from the Los Angeles express a passenger whom he promptly recognized as the young attorney, Burn Hopkins. Until the train pulled out again his official duties occupied his attention. The new arrival waited patiently, standing beside his grip. When Jim advanced, he held out a cordial hand.

"I've brought the dough, Mr. Marshall," he said gaily, without making any attempt to beat around the bush. "I'm not here to dicker, but just to pay, for, as I said to my principals from the start, I knew that your mind was finally made up. And the land is worth $200 per acre, that's certain, so it is simply a square deal for all parties concerned."

Not even by the quiver of an eyelid did Jim Marshall display either surprise or undue gratification.

"I knew the figure was right," he replied simply, "or I wouldn't have fixed it. I am satisfied, and am sure you fellows can earn a fine profit from the deal. That's as it should be. The men who bring in capital for developing a country like this deserve a very liberal reward."

"Well, all that remains to be done is for you to sign your relinquishment. I brought along the necessary form. And I didn't forget your request for currency. I have the cash with me, all in thousand dollar bills."

Jim smiled pleasedly.

"I'm glad to do business with a man like you, Mr. Hopkins. Regard for another's wishes saves a lot of time. Now I suppose you'll want to book a room at your hotel."

"My hotel," laughed the visitor, glancing around the moonlit desert scene.

"Oh, my cottage does duty for a hotel once in a while. You'll be my very welcome guest, sir."

"Well, just a corner to sleep in — that's all I require. I had my supper on the dining car, and I believe I can catch a west-bound train early in the morning."

"Seven-thirty-five," replied the station agent. "Well, just wait till I turn the key in my office door. Then we'll cross over. Not that my office needs locking," he resumed, dangling the key on a finger as he returned to the attorney's side. "Let me take your grip, please. As I was going to remark, hoboes used to make this a stopping place over night, but they know

better than to do that nowadays. My plan was to put them under the spigot of one of the water tanks over there, and if they weren't afraid of Jim Marshall they were mighty scared of the cold water, I can tell you. Submarine Junction is now known as the Shower Bath among the villainous crew of desert thieves."

Jim was laughing with quiet satisfaction, but he kept his own counsel. His companion little knew of the score that had even yet, in Jim's reckoning, to be paid off by the yeggman fraternity.

"I'm almost sorry they stopped coming," the station agent went on, "for the shower bath kind o' livened up things at times."

Hopkins too had laughed.

"Yes, I guess it's pretty lonesome here. So my friend Ned Collier has told me."

"Oh, you know Ned Collier, do you?" asked Jim with well assumed surprise.

"Yes. In a way he is the real original boomer of Submarine Junction. It was he who first told me of the possibilities of this place — just indicated them, you know. But I was quick enough to catch on, and when I read that the high-line canal project was going to materialize at last, was Johnny-on-the-Spot with data for my syndicate."

"Ned is a bright boy," remarked Jim.

They had now stepped onto the cottage veranda.

"You see, I have a spare stretcher," continued the host, "all ready for you or any other friend that may blow in. Sure I can't get a bite of supper ready for you? No? Well, I myself have supped or dined, call it what you will."

"I would suggest we get through with our little business first of all," suggested the visitor. "Oh, just leave the grip out here. I've the bills in my pocketbook. Thank you," he added, as Jim held open the door leading to the inner room where a lamp was already alight, turned low.

Within a brief space of time the relinquishment paper had been signed and witnessed, and the fat wad of thirty-two thousand-dollar bills transferred. No receipt passed — that would have violated the law. But the attorney explained that he had scrip in his grip which next day at the land office in San Bernardino would secure a clear and unencumbered title to the land, once the new filing had been made, immediately after the lodging of the relinquishment.

"Smoke?" asked the attorney after the satisfactory conclusion of the business. He had produced a cigar case from his pocket.

"Thanks," assented Jim. "But suppose we sit out on the porch. It is cooler there."

The guest assented, and for an hour they puffed their weeds, the attorney in placid contentment over the successful completion of his mission, Jim, in listening mood, discreetly allowing the visitor to do most of the talking.

He dared not put any leading questions, but an inquiry how Ned, his predecessor in the station agent's job, was getting along, led to some remarks that were full of interest.

Ned was doing well — in line for steady promotion. Hopkins met him quite often at the home of his mother-in-law, Mrs. Marsh Gordon, a well-known painter

on china. He sometimes thought that Ned was a bit sweet on Bessie, the younger daughter. He himself had married Bernice, the elder daughter, and their first baby had arrived only a week ago.

Jim's heart thumped like a trip hammer. But he managed to speak quite composedly.

"My congratulations. All going well?"

"Sure, or do you imagine I'd be here? A bouncing boy, nine and a quarter pounds, and both mother and child getting along splendidly. Now, Mr. Marshall, as I've got to be up early, I think I'll turn in, by your leave."

The host arranged his guest's bed, folding down the cover and shaking the pillow. He himself would take a little stroll — his regular habit every night, as he explained.

In the solitude of the brooding desert, out under the moon and the faintly twinkling stars, Jim Marshall mused on all the wonders that were coming to him. He was a grandfather now. Thank God! He had often been afraid that Bernice might have been affected by her mother's theories of birth control. God be praised it was not so. He was of the old-fashioned school, prepared and glad to accept the gifts of Providence just as they came along. And what greater gift than a child in the home?

The moonlight made things almost as bright as day, and he counted over again his roll of currency. Thirty-two thousand dollars! One half was certainly Ned's, the other his own. Ned had refused point blank to divide, but that made no difference with Jim Marshall. Ned must take the share that was properly his

— it was even through him that the prompt deal had been made.

Alone and in the solemn quietude of the night Jim thought out his subsequent plans. Lavigne was due at the station the day after tomorrow. He would get him to arrange a meeting with the pugnacious Irishmen in Yuma, where they conducted their business affairs and therefore visited at frequent intervals, keeping each other company because of their mutual distrust, perhaps also for the pleasure of quarreling most of the time.

Meanwhile Jim would send in his resignation to railway headquarters, giving a month's notice if necessary. For despite his sudden access of wealth, he would, as a matter of course, continue the faithful discharge of his duties until proper arrangements could be made to fill his place. No doubt there might be only a few days' delay in appointing his successor, and then he would be free to go to Yuma — the very town, curiously enough, for which he was making nearly four years before when Ned saved his life on the railroad tracks.

The meeting with Reilly and Burke in Yuma would have to appear to be a chance one. All that was thoroughly understood between himself and Lavigne.

Now that Jim Marshall was entering on big business, the native shrewdness of his character, hitherto repressed, was beginning to display itself. He had in his mind a certain price for the Reilly-Burke land and stock — a perfectly just price, he held, considering their benighted methods of running the cattle ranch. But the offer would have to be sprung on the sellers suddenly, to accept or reject, with a bunch of the crisp

one-thousand-dollar bills as bait that would most likely prove irresistible. For the deal at Jim's figure would undoubtedly have to be closed there and then. Otherwise, if the terms came to be talked over with outsiders, Reilly and his partner would be sure to receive any amount of gratuitous advice about enhanced land values through the building of the high-line canal, although in point of fact, this improvement had only a remote connection with their holdings.

The new railroad was different. However, those thriftless, ignorant cattlemen probably knew little or nothing about the project. Moreover it was still in the air — very much in the air. But if Jim did secure possession of the ranch, it was part of his ultimate plans to revive interest in the spur line — Lavigne and he were going to put their shoulders to the wheel to make the railroad authorities carry out the work, or alternatively they would raise capital for an independent line. In all these subsequent endeavors Reilly and Burke would have no part or share, so that the just price for their land now was present value and nothing more.

Jim was quite clear to his own conscience. He was going to take advantage of no one, but he was determined to get that land. In its present owners' hands it was comparatively valueless, while under his control it would become the foundation of a big fortune — just how colossal a fortune Jim did not care to speculate.

For the present he was content yet once more to count the money of which less than a moiety would, no doubt, enable him to put through the deal. He did so,

then carefully stowed the bills into his belt, and finally turned his footsteps toward home.

Burn Hopkins was already asleep on his stretcher on the porch.

It was half-past six o'clock next morning when the guest was awakened with the genial cry: "Breakfast all ready in the dining car — first and last call."

Jim stood laughing in the doorway, a big toasting fork in his hand.

Coffee, rashers of bacon, fried eggs, hot biscuits — the young attorney had never enjoyed a meal better in all his life. And a little later he was waving goodby to his host from the observation platform of the westward-bound express.

Jim Marshall was once more alone. A fancy came to him. He went to the freight platform, and stepped upon the scales.

"One hundred and sixty-eight pounds! Gee! That's what good old Submarine has done for me in less than four years. Seventy-seven pounds gained from the old skin and bone days, and ten dollars of capital converted into sixteen thousand for me and another sixteen thousand for Ned. Great Scott! That's certainly going some." And, thinking of the former emaciated and impoverished times, he patted his belt-line with proud satisfaction — the proper girth was now there, and the money as well.

"But it is not," mused Jim, "what a man has but rather what he is and will be that need interest one's friends. Every truly great man is stronger for an experience and with his increased strength should come increased gentleness."

CHAPTER XXIV

ADIOS, SUBMARINE

WHEN Marsh Gordon had arrived at Submarine, he was a minus quantity as regards personal belongings. He had had only one thing left to lose, and had promptly lost that, too — his name. But with his lost identity he had found a friend. And friendship is a pearl without price — the silken girdle that binds the hearts of men together in eternal bonds — the sublime solace which is not fully appreciated until all else is lost.

During the closing weeks of his service as station agent, serene in the consciousness that he was equipped now with the weapon that could not fail to open the way leading to the achievement of big things, he fell into the habit of writing down his thoughts. One night, during an hour of musing, he had been asking himself the question: "What is success?" Now that the ripe fruit was so near to his hand, what did it really mean for him? Material gain counted for very little indeed. Spiritual happiness derived from the helping of his fellow-men — that surely was the true goal. With the philosophy of his meditations still in mind, he reached for a writing-pad, and this is what he wrote:

"Success belongs to the man who has lived, labored, laughed and loved; who has plucked the priceless jewel of noble character from the furnace of life's sacrificial

struggle; who has walked with his God across sun-parched deserts to serve a friend; who has been kind and gentle to little children and thereby won their love; who has also been generous to the poor in purse, inspiring hope in the hearts of the hopeless; whose heart is a reservoir of contentment, reflecting the glow of an undimmed conscience upon a face of cheerfulness; whose life has been clean and free from taint, from lust and greed and avarice; whose love for his mother and wife and children has been so true that all womankind challenge his respect; who has substituted the love of greatness for the greatness of love, and by thought and deed has served the world in which he lives, transforming arid wastes into verdant vale and flowering dale; whose sympathy has lightened the burden of oppressed labor; who has given the best within him to his fellows; who has turned the feet of the profane to the higher walks of life and thus saved a soul; who has discovered the noblest qualities in others; whose life has been an inspiration to friend and a rebuke to foe, and whose memory in after years will be a benediction worthy the floral gifts brought by loved ones to his tomb. With such a cumulative record, life is a success, though the man die a prince or a pauper."

After penning the above sentences, carefully, pausing here and there for a word, at times amending a phrase, he leaned back in his chair, and once more fell to ruminating. So love was the only true and sure foundation of success.

"Now what is love?"— this was the next and con-

sequential question he was asking himself. After a time he reached once more for his pen, and the answer flowed from it as follows:

"Love is the 'beginning,' the 'span,' and the 'ending' of every mortal who regards the jewel of the soul as the true riches of earth, and immortality's crown in the life beyond, where the Great King reigns, as the only thing worth striving for, the one reward for unselfish living.

"Humanity demands, conscience approves, and all that is good in the world applauds the genial and glowing warmth of honest love, whether it is between husband and wife, parent and child, sister and brother, the 'lassie' for her 'laddie,' the love of a dog for its master or the master's love for his dog, or the love universal in the heart of man for the Infinite.

"Love now. Love always — today, tomorrow, and for evermore. Do not seal up for future use the spirit within you of 'man's humanity to man.' Dispense gentleness and sympathy, tenderness and love, ever keeping the best within you awake and actively doing deeds of goodness to your brother men. Never forget, as the poet Nixon Waterman has beautifully expressed it, that 'a rose to the living is worth more than sumptuous wreaths to the dead.'

"The more sight drafts of sympathy you pay with the 'golden coin' of rational, sincere love, the stronger you will become and the more dividends you can and will distribute by the wayside to the meek and the lowly who are famishing all about you for just 'old-fashioned' kindness.

"Give consideration and charity in 'full measure pressed down.' Do not wait for death to stimulate your sympathy. Post-mortem protestations of love are usually an idle pretence — not only an insult to the memory of the departed but evidence irrefragable of hypocrisy. Tie up every unhappy incident of the past into bundles of the forgotten, and throw them overboard as useless ballast. It is present love that counts. Love now, love ever."

With these thoughts in his mind Jim arose and slowly paced the room. It was close on midnight, and it was the last night in the little cottage where he had lived his desert life of loneliness, yet of happiness, the memory of which now filled his heart with overflowing gratitude to the kind Providence that had guided his steps to the haven of Submarine and the helpful hand of Ned Collier.

Ned Collier — to whom, as man to man, he owed so much, his all. He drew from his pocket Ned's last letter, and stopped beside the lamp to peruse once again a certain passage it contained. This passage was a gay but very determined refusal to share the profits from the homestead land. "Not on your life, old boy," the sentence ran. "I am making my own way in the world, you are making yours. More power to your good right arm! The land was yours, its price is yours. And don't forget how at the very start I warned you about violating the law. My sharing now would be collusion — flagrant collusion. No federal penitentiary for this here child! I stand for the law all the time, and so do you, Jim. No doubt you could

slip me that cash all right without anyone but ourselves being the wiser. But remember conscience, my friend — the conscience about which you used to speak to me so many words of wisdom, the conscience that never slumbers, that judges a man to himself, that pricks and wounds through life even when its owner may pretend to smile. Get thee behind me, Satan! You'll make grand use of all that money, Jim — far grander use than I could ever hope to make with any part of it — not for yourself alone, for I know your unselfish nature, but for all around you. You will be able now to carry into effect your gospel of love, to build for the success which will make you more useful still to humanity at large. Go ahead and prosper, just as I am doing, thanks in no small measure to your teachings during that glorious period of our comradeship. Sometimes I didn't seem to be listening, eh? when you used to deliver those grand orations. But you see I was absorbing them all the time, like a suckling child."

Over Jim's features came a smile of ineffable love and contentment. "God bless that boy," he fervently murmured. Then he resumed his seat and his pen.

"Dear old Ned:

"Tomorrow morning I leave Submarine for Yuma. So this is just a line to supplement my usual weekly letter. I am only going to refer to that division of profits. Your argument does not hold good. Let us forget the past; share with me simply for the present. Read the enclosed lucubrations about Success and Love. It was your letter in your absence that prompted

me to put these thoughts on paper. You will see that by advising me to selfishness you would make me deny my own creed of what life should be.

"However, if you still persist, remember so do I. Whenever I get to Yuma, your $16,000 goes into a bank, old man, there to accumulate interest until you ask for a settlement of accounts between us. I note what you say about my making profitable use of the money. Perhaps I can, perhaps I will. But none of it shall ever go out of the bank without the best collateral. So just as soon as you repent of your obstinacy, Ned, you may call on me for principal and interest to date at any time. These will be my last words on the subject, partner, for the present at all events.

"Your old chum, JIM."

He folded the letter, enclosed it in an envelope with the two writings he had previously made, and inscribed the address. Next he took from his pocket a little bundle of envelopes, ten or a dozen in number, held together by an india-rubber band. He drew forth one; there was already a typewritten address upon it — Mrs. Marsh Gordon, Venice-by-the-Sea, California.

Within the envelope was a blank sheet of yellow paper. Opening one pouch of his money belt, Jim produced a wad of currency — mostly one-hundred-dollar bills, with some of smaller denominations, change for one of the thousand-dollar bills, which Lavigne had brought to him a few days previously from Yuma. Wrapping a one-hundred-dollar bill in the yellow blank,

he moistened the flap of the envelope, finally placing it under a heavy book so that it should be well sealed without the aid of sealing wax that might have directed attention to its possibly valuable contents. A few minutes later he affixed postage stamps both to this letter and to the one for Ned, then bestowed the two missives in his pocket.

Again he surveyed the little room. The book shelves alone were bare — the volumes had been boxed and taken away by Lavigne, to be kept temporarily in his care. Everything else in sight Jim left for his successor. Naked he had come to Submarine, naked he would depart. It was a land agent who would come into possession early on the morrow. For the cottage had passed to the buyers of the homestead, and already there was a sprinkling of tepees up and down both sides of the line — temporary dwellings of first town settlers awaiting the arrival of lumber wherewith to build their homes.

The new station agent was making his quarters meanwhile in the depot — the railway company was going to put up a house for him appropriate to the new town. Jim had surrendered office that very afternoon. Tomorrow morning early he would swing onto the eastward-bound express from Los Angeles.

"So in a few hours from now it will be *adios* to good old Submarine," he murmured, as he began to disrobe for the last time in his desert home.

Jim was thinking and dreaming. "Yes," he said aloud, "money is the punctuation point that ends all sentences, whether spoken or written, and determines

the direction of the compass, even though it leads us among the ruder things of earth. In most lives yesterday is a memory, today a reality, and tomorrow a vision."

CHAPTER XXV

AN OLD FRIEND

NEXT day Jim Marshall was in Yuma. He took a room at the best hotel. He then repaired to a clothing store, and fitted himself out with new garments from top to toe. He made no choice of fashionable clothes — just the suitable wear for a rancher, trousers and coat of serviceable drab olive, blue shirt, flowing tie, and fine big sombrero, all of the best. In this by no means unpicturesque garb, he looked a fine figure of a man — tall, erect, stalwart, with health of body reflected in the clear eye and ruddy sun-tanned complexion.

Next he bought himself a watch, one of the best standard makes, in a solid gold case and with a solid gold chain, of neat and unobtrusive pattern, to match it. He continued his purchases — boots, underwear, handkerchiefs, comb, brushes, a supply of blades for his safety razor — nothing was forgotten. Then, with a couple of good-sized grips, he counted his outfitting, for the present at all events, as complete.

At the hour he knew the westward-bound Sunset Limited would be due he sauntered back to the railway station. There he posted on the mail car the two missives he had carried with him from Submarine — the one addressed to Mrs. Marsh Gordon containing the

hundred-dollar bill, the other to Ned Collier carrying the message in regard to the division of profits from the land deal. Midday dinner was now in order, for Francois Lavigne would not arrive till evening.

While shopping and strolling through the town, Jim had carefully scrutinized various bank windows, and it had been without surprise that he noted inscribed on one of them, among the list of officials, the name of Michael O'Meara, vice-president. He had often thought of the kind-hearted rancher who had befriended him in the hour of pained humiliation and deepest misery. He had not forgotten O'Meara's avowed intention of selling his homestead and returning to banking pursuits. In Yuma, the nearest town of commercial importance, the desert sojourner would secure just the same climate that had restored him to sound health. So it was quite in the natural order of things to find O'Meara here.

After dinner Jim repaired to the bank. O'Meara had not changed a bit, except for his clothes. He was visible through the glass panels that screened a side room, seated at a desk, going over some papers. Jim instantly recognized him, but the banker received his visitor with the formality due to a complete stranger.

"Be seated, please," he said, indicating a vacant chair. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, I wish to open an account," replied Jim with a quiet smile. "But before I do so, Mr. O'Meara, I want to ask you whether you remember me."

"I certainly don't recollect seeing you before," replied the banker, half in apology.

"Well, you once provided me with a bed among your alfalfa haystacks, you gave me my breakfast, you fitted me out with a fine Mexican hat, and you loaned me five dollars."

"What!" exclaimed O'Meara in profound amazement. "You don't mean to tell me that you are that long, lanky fellow whom the hoboes had stripped of his clothes?"

"I'm the man. I keep that old Mexican hat yet in remembrance of your kindness. In my next home I'm going to hang it up on the wall."

O'Meara was now laughing heartily.

"Well, you certainly looked a comical cuss that day when you rode off on Dan's wagon in the tall headpiece and your tattered clothes. But I had sized you up all right, my friend, so was not one bit surprised when, later on, the five dollars I had loaned you returned. The next fellow who got them wasn't so honest. But that's the way of the world, and one success, as it seems I made with you, compensates for all the other failures."

"I have always gratefully remembered your kindness," murmured Jim.

"Oh, we'll forget that. But you did take kindly to my cream"— the genial Irishman was laughing again. "You lapped it down like a famished kitten."

"Well, I was and am no kitten," grinned Jim. "But famished — that's just how I felt when you took me into your home. And the cream, I guess, was the beginning of my cure. Look at me now," he added, extending his brawny arms in a way that showed the condition of a well-trained athlete.

"It's a miracle, that's just what it is. But although your case looked pretty bad, I had a kind of half belief that the desert air would save you, just as it had saved me. Your letter with the remittance didn't tell me where you had settled, and you only signed yourself — let me see now — yes, yes — Jim. If I remember right, that was the name."

"Quite right — Jim Marshall. I've been the station agent at Submarine Junction for the past three years."

"By jingo, you got on well — you certainly made good."

"And I was fortunate enough to homestead one of the best quarter sections of land there. Between ourselves, in signing my relinquishment I made a mighty good deal."

"Yes, I've heard that there is going to be a town there at last. The high-line canal will lead to the development of all the country around Submarine."

"Well, today, Mr. O'Meara, I want to open an account with your bank, but I want it opened in one particular way. The account will be in the name of Jim Marshall, Trustee, and that is how I'll sign if I ever come to check against it. Probably the deposit will remain intact — at least a good proportion of it will. What is your rate of interest under these circumstances?"

"Three and sometimes four per cent. But look here, Marshall, in your special case I'm prepared to allow you five per cent on daily balance. How will that suit you? And the amount of the deposit?"

"Sixteen thousand dollars," answered Jim as he proceeded to unbuckle his money belt.

"Holy smoke," ejaculated O'Meara, "I had no idea of such a large sum or I wouldn't have named so high a rate." But the banker was smiling pleasedly all the same — it was not often that such a fat deposit dropped into the bank coffers from the clouds. And money could be profitably employed right then, in these days of vigorous development all around the country town. So O'Meara made no further comment while he watched Jim count out sixteen thousand-dollar bills. He accepted the currency, checked the amount, and touched a buzzer that brought the chief cashier to his side.

Jim continued:

"I also want a second account in the name simply of Jim Marshall — no word 'trustee' in this case. I'll check against it in the ordinary way — it will be my current account, you understand."

Both O'Meara and the cashier nodded.

"I am only going to put one thousand dollars to the credit of this second account today. Perhaps to-morrow or a little later there will be more to go in. Meanwhile, however, here is the amount — one thousand dollars. Now I'll be glad to get the pass books and my check books — two separate check books, please."

The cashier departed to his own sanctum, and a few minutes later returned with the books and the card for the new client's specimen signature. Jim had resumed his belt. After glancing at the entries he placed the pass books together with the check books in his coat pocket.

"So you are going to settle in Yuma?" inquired

O'Meara, when Jim and he were again alone. "I remember recommending the place to you as a health resort. And let me tell you now that it is a fine business place for a man with some capital — couldn't be beat in the whole Southwest. What with the Government dam at Laguna and other water improvements, things are booming right along. I'll be glad to put you up for membership in the Chamber of Commerce."

"Thanks — after a while," replied Jim. "My plans are not quite settled yet. Tomorrow, perhaps, I'll know better. Are you acquainted with Mr. Francois Lavigne?"

"The rancher up the river? Oh, yes; I know about him — good solid man. But he doesn't happen to be one of our customers."

"He's a friend of mine — used to come over regularly to Submarine Junction to ship out his wool or fat sheep. Well, in any case I'm going to pay him a little visit. I want to have a look at those river valley lands."

"Rich soil, of course. But I'm told they are shy of irrigation water in some places. You be on your guard, Mr. Marshall. I think I could put you onto better land much nearer to Yuma. Let me ring up the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce."

The banker's hand was reaching for the telephone, but Jim interposed.

"Not yet, Mr. O'Meara. I'll be in town quite likely for a few days. There is just one favor I'm going to ask. Let us step round to the store where I bought this new hat of mine. I want you to accept a hat from me for old time's sake."

"Oh, nonsense," laughed the banker. "You are troubled with a sensitive conscience, eh? You want to pay me back for that old Mexican hat? No, no; that's not to be thought of for a moment."

But Jim insisted. He had risen to his feet, and O'Meara had followed his example. Jim hooked the banker by the elbow, and, both laughing, they left the building arm in arm, like tried and trusted friends.

CHAPTER XXVI

TURNING CATTLEMAN

REILLY and Burke were in town — Jim Marshall had ascertained this, unobtrusively, without inquiring of anyone, simply by examining the registers at different hotels. The hotel where they were quartered he found to be only a block or two away from his own. It was a less pretentious establishment, its charges quite evidently cheaper, and its patronage accordingly of a rougher class. Jim made no move to open up an acquaintance until Lavigne should arrive.

It was almost the supper hour before the rancher put in an appearance. Jim was reading a newspaper in the hotel lobby, deeply interested over an article about government experiments in acclimating the date palm, when Lavigne laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Jim."

"Francois, old fellow."

It was the first time the two men had met away from Submarine Junction, and there was extra cordiality in the handgrip exchanged.

"Glad to see you here," said Francois. "I drove over in my buckboard. That will be more comfortable than the wagon to take you back with me to my home. Hortense is all eagerness to welcome you. We are going to have a grand old time."

"You're mighty kind," responded Jim. "Sit down

for a few minutes. I see that Reilly and Burke are both in Yuma."

"Oh, yes. As I told you, they invariably come in around the first of the month. I spoke to Burke the day before yesterday. He is all primed up to sell. He wants to go back to Ireland, and hopes Reilly will take the opposite direction — to Japan. He never wants to see his ugly mug again — that's how he put it," Francois went on laughing. "I took the chance to drop a hint that I thought I knew a possible buyer who might be in Yuma this week. He rose to the fly like a rainbow trout, wanted to know more, but I let it rest at that. You'll have no difficulty with him, I think that's sure."

"And Reilly?"

"Well, Reilly drunk and Reilly sober are two different men. When he has a load aboard, he is as snarly as a mountain cat and as obstinate as a mule. At other times he is not half a bad fellow, provided Burke doesn't happen to be around. He's shrewd, too, and long-headed; knows quite well that two quarrelsome partners can never make money; and I fancy he also will be only too glad to quit if the price you are prepared to pay is about right. I have had another chat, since I saw you, with Miguel, the Indian cowboy. There are certainly close on 400 head of stock all told, nearly all on the range. For there's mighty little feed around the ranch house just now. There hasn't been a drop of rain for close on six months."

"Irrigation will put that all right," commented Jim. "When are you going to tackle those fellows?"

"Tomorrow morning, bright and early, when Reilly

will be at his best and easiest to handle. I've put up at their hotel this time, so that we can't help running against each other without any appearance of my chasing them. You just sit around here during the forenoon. When I bring 'em along, you'll know they are ready to consider a proposal."

"All right. And now, Francois, you'll dine with me. The best hotel table in Yuma is yours by right, my friend. Or perhaps I should say *mon ami* now. You'll have to teach me French in my old age." Jim had an arm around his comrade's shoulders as, laughing, they moved toward the dining room.

Next day, in the other hotel, Reilly and Burke were getting ready to enjoy their morning meal seated at the opposite far ends of the long dining room, with morning papers held in front of them so as to shut out the view of each other's countenances. Lavigne entered, surveyed the scene, smiled, and, as there were no other guests present, called out:

"Look here, boys, you are both going to breakfast with me this morning. It's not often that neighbors meet away from home. Come along. We'll take this table, my dear"— this to a pretty little waitress who had just entered with the day's bill-of-fare in her hand.

Awkwardly, half reluctantly, the two partners moved up from their frigid poles toward the equatorial belt of the room.

"Good morning to you," said Reilly gruffly, eyeing Burke as much as to say that there must be some show of politeness before company.

"Same to you," growled Burke, with a glowering

glance that further discounted the display of unwonted courtesy.

But they took their seats all the same, one on each side of Lavigne, and, under the Frenchman's genial guiding influence, the meal proceeded pleasantly enough. Mexico was the principal subject discussed — faction-torn and bandit-ridden Mexico.

Both the cattlemen knew the border country well, and had interesting comments on the situation. Burke was very gloomy as to the final outcome of events; but Reilly was inclined to be optimistic.

"I tell you, Mr. Lavigne," he declared toward the close of the discussion, "if I had the capital right now, I could make a barrel of money by buying cattle for spot cash across the line."

"You'd have a slim chance of getting out of the country with your spot cash or any cattle either," commented Burks. "They are nothing but a lot of damned thieves."

"I'm accustomed to take care of myself," retorted Reilly.

"Oh, the men who really know the people," interposed Lavigne with a genial right and left smile, "and who can speak their lingo, can handle the business all right. It's only the tenderfoot that gets stung."

"Some pretty old and tough tenderfeet have lost their lives this time," observed Burke.

"Well, I ain't old, and I ain't tough, nor am I particularly tender," laughed Reilly with a half snarl and snap in his voice. "All the same, I'd bet to make two dollars for one at the game."

"Why don't you have a try at it, then?" asked Lavigne.

"Where's the money, I'd like to know, in these hard times?"

"Oh, you might get a loan on the ranch, couldn't you? I myself might even spare a couple of thousand dollars and go in on the deal."

"What! And leave Burke in possession? Not on your blamed life. The whole place would go to the dogs in a week."

He spoke frankly — in complete disregard of his partner's presence. But Lavigne had often enough before heard similar remarks and Burke by his indifference showed that he was quite accustomed to personalities of the kind. At present he was too busy over a succulent T-bone steak to have his irascibility aroused.

So the conversation proceeded without disturbance.

"I was telling your partner the other day," said Lavigne, still addressing Reilly, "that I happen to know a man who is looking for some cattle country handy to Yuma."

"A buyer?" came the eager query.

"Spot cash, I was informed."

"At what figure?"

"How should I know? I guess you've got to give him a price."

"Where's he to be found?" asked Burke, relinquishing his knife and fork. "And what's his name?"

"Mr. Marshall is his name. I fancy he is likely to be registered at the Gondolfo if he's in town. Perhaps we might stroll around."

"Right you are." Both partners drew back their chairs from the table.

"But he doesn't know much about your place," continued Lavigne. "He has just picked up a few facts, from hearsay, about different ranches in the neighborhood. I believe he is ready to make an offer on mine. But he knows I'm not on the market — unless, of course, I happen to change my mind."

Reilly looked uneasy; he rose to his feet.

"We had better see him right away then," he proposed.

"Well, I was going to ask whether you haven't a map of some kind to show him — your acreage, boundary lines, and all that sort of thing."

"We've got a map with our abstracts of title, of course."

"In the safe deposit vaults at the First National Bank," added Burke, "just around the corner."

"It might be well then, to have the map with you. Of course you know your stock figures?"

"If we can agree on a price per head," repeated Reilly, "we can have a muster in double quick time."

"All right, if that comes to be necessary," concurred Lavigne. "Well, if you like, gentlemen, we'll make a move. We can visit the Safe Deposit in passing. No, no; these breakfasts are on me"— he was paying the pretty waitress, and with his tip was bestowing on her the true Frenchman's gallant smile. "The dinners tonight may be yours, if by any chance we can put through a deal."

"Now, don't be too damned bull-headed," said Burke in an aside to his partner.

"You keep your greedy mouth shut," retorted Reilly, also in a low tone. "If you don't put your foot in it, I may get rid of you at last, damn your eyes."

"Come along, brothers," exclaimed Francois, extending an arm over the shoulders of each of the pair of heavenly twins.

Jim was seated in the lobby of his hotel, smoking a cigar, while he scanned the morning newspaper. Francois saw him from the corner of his eye, but went through the formality of inquiring of the desk clerk whether Mr. James Marshall happened to be registered.

"That's him — right over there," was the clerk's reply.

Francois glanced in the indicated direction.

"So it is. Come along then, boys. I'll introduce you. Of course if you want me to clear out, I'll leave you alone."

"No, no,"— the negative came from both the partners.

"In fact, we'd rather you put the business points for us," suggested Reilly. "If Burke tries to handle the gentleman, there's not one chance in a hundred of a deal being put through."

"And God help us if you had to do the talking," retorted Burke amiably.

"All right, boys. No quarreling. I'll try to help you out, both of you. Come on. Don't miss this opportunity."

Jim Marshall rose with quite stately dignity when Lavigne accosted him by name.

"Oh, yes. I remember you, Mr. Lavigne. Glad to meet you again. And your friends?"

"Mr. Reilly — Mr. Burke. They are the owners of a cattle ranch up the river — near neighbors of mine, in fact. The last time we met you remarked that you were on the outlook for just such a property."

"Well, I'm not quite sure — I'm half thinking now of sheep."

"Oh, sheep can't touch cows," interjected Burke.

"Shut your damned mouth," growled Reilly, under his breath and with a savage glare at the offender.

Mr. Marshall was too polite to see or overhear.

"Well, I'm a sheep man, as you know," continued Lavigne, "first, last, and all the time. But sheep and wool need a good deal more experience in handling than range-running cattle. These gentlemen have a map of their property with them, and can give you a close estimate of the number of stock. Their ranch has the great advantage of having the foothills right behind it — Government land and likely to be Government land for the next hundred years, and the best grazing country ever."

"Oh, I'm not a buyer of blue sky," laughed Jim.

"But wouldn't you like to look at the map? They have got their abstracts, too, right here in Yuma. Not one dollar of encumbrance on property or stock. 1280 acres of land, and about 350 head of stock of all ages. That's the figure you gave me, Mr. Burke, isn't it?"

"Yes; 350 more or less — probably more."

Reilly was about to get in some reply, too, but Lavigne discreetly squeezed his arm.

"You'll look over the papers, won't you?" Lavigne continued to argue. "At least there can be no harm done, and you'll be adding to your knowledge of the country."

Reilly produced from his pocket a little red-taped bundle of papers, among which showed the glazed linen fabric of a survey tracing. He proffered the packet to Jim, but the latter waved it aside.

"Well, we can't talk business here. Suppose we go up to my room. I happen to have a private parlor on the second floor."

The cattlemen almost tumbled over each other as they crowded up the stairs.

Among the papers were the certificates of title for the two sections of land, one of which stood in the name of Reilly, the other in the name of Burke. Besides the map of the two adjacent holdings, there was an agreement of partnership executed twelve years before, under which the live stock were run on the land and on the range as joint property.

Jim examined the documents with leisurely care. He had handed round a box of cigars, and left the others to go ahead with their smoking. Burke kept an eye on Reilly, Reilly an eye on Burke. But Lavigne, at the opposite side of the table to Jim, separated them, and it was to him that Jim addressed an occasional query about this mark or that mark, the special features of the land, the average rainfall, and so on. Finally, first jotting down the figure 350 as representing the likely number of stock, Jim did a little ciphering on a sheet of paper, the two Irishmen watching his facile pencil intently. When he had finished his nota-

tions, Jim folded the paper, and rested a hand on it.

"Well, your price, gentlemen?" he asked, glancing from the one partner to the other.

This was a poser; the two sellers looked at each other across the table, with the sullen ferocity of a couple of strange bulls.

Lavigne interposed.

"Couldn't you make an offer, Mr. Marshall?"

"I can't be both seller and buyer," calmly objected Jim.

"There are special circumstances in this case," Lavigne continued to urge. "If you name your figure, these gentlemen will at least consider it."

"Well, I reckon that the ranch may be worth $10,000 — land and stock."

"Twelve thousand," roared Burke.

"Fifteen thousand, you idiot," Reilly almost screamed.

It looked as if a fight was on. But Jim quietly readjusted the tape round the bundle of papers, then proceeded to select a cigar. Lavigne was gripping each partner by a wrist.

"Then we are not agreed, gentlemen," resumed Jim, after his cigar was alight. "I was prepared to pay cash — $10,000 in currency."

As he spoke he reached a hand to his money belt, and produced a wad of bills. He opened the roll — spread the bills a trifle apart.

"Ten one-thousand dollar bills," he went on, as he rustled the crisp currency.

Burke's eyes fairly popped; Francois could feel Reilly's arm trembling.

"That would fix you up for your Mexican venture," observed Lavigne, with a glance at Reilly.

"Ireland for me," gurgled Burke in a low tone.

Jim was now rolling up the notes again.

"I'll sell my half interest for $5000," exclaimed Burke, extending a hand across the table. "If Reilly sells too," he added by way of afterthought, as he shot a vengeful glance at his partner.

"By God, I'll take the $5000 if only to be rid of you, you derned hydrophobia skunk."

Lavigne held the two men apart. Reilly continued, addressing the buyer again:

"It's a mighty good bargain for you, Mr. Marshall. But spot cash is spot cash, and it enables me at last to break that agreement of partnership with the lowest-down mongrel"—

Burke would have sprung at Reilly's throat but for Lavigne's firm detaining grip.

"Now, now, boys. Why quarrel, when you are going to part tomorrow, perhaps forever? It appears to me the deal is through. $10,000 goes."

"All right," growled Reilly, and Burke, too, uttered a grumbling assent.

"Very well, gentlemen," said Jim. "We'll telephone for an attorney, and draw up the necessary papers here and now — transfer deeds for the land and a bill of sale for all the stock. The brand, double XL on a bar, with an underclip out of the left ear, of course goes with the cattle. Your usual attorney will be good enough for me, but before paying over the money I reserve the right to submit the documents to

my banker here. If that's agreed we may count the deal as closed."

Two hours later Mike O'Meara had scrutinized and passed the documents, Reilly and Burke had departed each with his own particular wad of currency, Lavigne had said good-by for the present to attend to some business affairs on his own account, and Jim and the banker were alone.

"I guess it's a pretty good buy, Marshall," remarked the latter, after a final glance at the map of the ranch.

"I hope so," replied Jim quietly. "It is both a speculation and an investment. But I'm taking my chance, and have paid a fair price, I think. Now I want to rent a safe deposit box for my papers, O'Meara. And you'll please put this extra $5000 to the credit of my current account. These men have three days to surrender possession. But tonight, after the moon is up, Lavigne and I start north. You'll be seeing me pretty frequently from time to time, my good friend. You hold my bank account; now just you watch it grow."

Jim laughed gaily, and a little later shook hands and went his way.

"Looks as if he had added another two inches to his chest measurement," smiled O'Meara to himself as through the plate glass window he watched the tall, straight figure swinging down the street. "Some way I believe in Jim Marshall, and best of all I believe he believes in himself. It is said a man others believe in is a power, but if he believes in himself he is doubly powerful."

CHAPTER XXVII

STOCK-TAKING

JIM MARSHALL had taken possession of his newly acquired property. Reilly and Burke had sorted out their personal belongings, and after a final frank expression of opinion how each regarded the other had left by different routes, the one south for Yuma and the Mexican border, the other north for Needles on his way to New York and thence to Ireland. With the departure of the quarrelsome couple peace at last reigned on the ranch; there was nothing more serious than the occasional angry bellowing of a bull to break the harmony of the scene. But in Jim's case the lowing, even the bellowing, of cattle was as music to the soul, for as a boy he had been bred on a farm and, although he had not realized it before, it was farm life, the daily contact with nature, the soil itself and its abounding productivity, that appealed most strongly to his heart.

So everything was eager joy and happiness, high hopes and meanwhile supreme contentment in the hard work which each day demanded. Even the names of the former proprietors were consigned to oblivion. The place was to be known as the Marshall Rancho; Jim had already sent out an order for letter heads bearing the name, also his cattle brand by way of heraldic adornment.

He continued to board for the present with his good friends and neighbors, the Lavignes, to whose home he had been welcomed with such cordial hospitality that he knew his presence, so far from being an intrusion, was a pleasure to his hosts by varying the monotony of their somewhat lonely lives. Of an evening Lavigne had already initiated Jim into the mysteries of cribbage, Hortense being well content to retire from a twenty years' tournament with flying colors. Francois, moreover, having found a new opponent, was diligently searching for some stray pieces of a set of chessmen with a view to teaching "the game of games," as he called it, to a less reluctant and more redoubtable pupil than his good wife had proved to be in the long ago, when attempts had been made, only to be despairingly abandoned.

To Jim, this new taste of home life was delightful. But that was not the only reason why he delayed for a time to start housekeeping on his own account. He was already beginning to convert the long log cabin into a bunk house and dining room for the farm hands and cowboys he was going to employ with the least delay possible. For himself he would build a modest little cottage on the plan of his old home at Submarine.

On the very first day of his arrival, Jim, guided by Francois, had inspected the abandoned water channel, also the canyon among the hills whence a tiny but permanent stream descended, only to lose its unconserved waters in the desert sands. Francois was, in his own way, quite an engineer, although his only school had been that of practical experience. Jim,

during recent years had not merely mastered the law of water rights, but had studied with his accustomed scholarly thoroughness numerous textbooks on water conservation and irrigation.

He had a fine eye, too, for what might be termed "the lay of the land," and had immediately decided on a dam across the canyon to secure the necessary reserve supply, and a reservoir on his own property to fill up a depression that might have been designed by nature for the utilitarian purpose to which it was now at last to be applied. Jim foresaw that this reservoir would become the main watering place for his herds, and could not fail to prove an invaluable adjunct to the stock-feeding plans he had in view.

Meanwhile, a couple of able-bodied tramps who had chanced to pass and had proved amenable to the lure of a few weeks of well-paid work, had been set to the task of repairing the abandoned channel and digging the lateral ditch which would eventually provide an ample supply of irrigation water for the entire acreage owned by himself and Lavigne. Nor had he neglected to send to the Land Office at San Bernardino the documentary filings on the water necessary to secure undisputed possession.

It had been a very busy and a very useful ten days. And now had arrived the momentous occasion of the cattle muster and count. During the interval the two cowboys, who had been in the employment of Reilly and Burke for a number of years, had brought in the vagrant herds. They had reported that the last maverick had been accounted for — the round-up was complete.

The result of the count exceeded Lavigne's estimate and Jim's most sanguine expectations — 90 calves, 85 yearlings, 78 two-year-olds, 65 three-year-olds, 101 breeding cows, and 10 bulls; 429 head of stock in all, besides the half-dozen riding ponies.

It had been a somewhat dry summer, the former owners had made no attempt to grow any feed additional to that which the back country provided, and the beasts, although healthy, were on the whole in lean condition. Jim's immediate decision was to cut out all the steers, and drive them to Imperial for sale, there being a steady demand and sure market there for stock for fattening. Before nightfall the sorting had been completed, 81 steers yarded, two-year-olds and three-year-olds, and the rest of the herd, heifers and cows, dispersed once again to their accustomed natural pasturages and waterholes.

By daylight on the following morning Jim, accompanied by the two cowboys, hit the southerly trail. He was riding a really fine pony that had been the one living thing on which Reilly had lavished what remnant of natural affections had survived the cantankerous years of partnership with his brother Hibernian. The pony was quiet and well-trained, and Jim rode it with the true air of the horseman who has acquired the art of equestrianship in the days of his youth. Those days might now be remote, in the intervening years Jim might have bestrode nothing more formidable than a cobbler's bench, but to his delight he had found himself still quite at home in the saddle, ready to subdue a bucking broncho should the occasion ever require.

At Imperial, after some spirited competition among the buyers, Jim was fortunate in securing an offer of $40 per head, thereby realizing $3240 in all. At such a price he was thankful to be rid of young male stock which for the present he himself could not fatten. The heifers were different — they would be the breeders on the ranch and the future source of all his profits.

Jim lost no time in starting the cowboys back for home, giving them instructions that, until his own return, they were to visit the ranchers all around and purchase on his behalf every available calf at a maximum price named. Already he had made arrangements with Lavigne for the temporary feeding of this young stock on one of the Frenchman's fields of alfalfa. He sent a message to his friend that he might not be home again for a week or ten days.

The first part of that period Jim put in by inspecting the finest ranches in the Valley. Everywhere he was made welcome, and the fullest facilities were afforded him to look over the irrigation ditches, watch the cultivation work in progress, and gather all the information he desired about stock, crops, returns, clearing, grading, fencing, and so on. He also visited the intake from the Colorado River, and studied the structure of dams and gates. It was a profitable time — profitable mainly because a trained student's mind was being brought to bear on the questions under investigation.

This task performed, he started for Yuma, taking that route for home for sundry reasons. His first visit was to O'Meara at the bank. He drew from his money belt the certified check he had received at Imperial in payment for his steers.

THE RANCH PARTNERS QUARREL

"Three thousand two hundred and forty dollars!" exclaimed O'Meara in some surprise, as he examined the strip of paper. "You have certainly started pretty quick to get your investment back."

"I told you to watch my account grow," responded Jim, quietly. "Now I warn you that you may for a time see it rapidly diminish," he added with a smile.

Then he proceeded to explain to his friend how he was going to improve his property, how the water supply had been secured, how the lateral ditch had already been started, and how within a year at latest he would have his entire holding of 1280 acres subdivided into fenced fields of 40 or 80 acres apiece, producing crops of alfalfa, sorghum, millet, Kaffir corn, and other food stuffs which would enable him to multiply his herds and sell steers in numbers ready fattened for the market and therefore at top-notch prices all the time.

O'Meara eyed the keen, intellectual face of the man outlining this project. At the close, he made no attempt to conceal his enthusiastic admiration.

"By guns, you're a sure winner, Marshall," he declared emphatically. "That's what I call fertilizing land with brains — the greatest fertilizer of all. But your wire fencing is going to run you into a big outlay."

"I know it," replied Jim, "for it has got to be hog-tight fencing, too. I bought 200 of the finest Berkshire brood sows down in Imperial, and ten of the best-blooded boars in the valley — regardless of price, O'Meara, for it is the parent stock that makes the ranch. You see, I have tumbled to the fact that hogs

are the economical feeders to follow cattle — they eat up all the waste and stray feed, and become a by-product that costs little or nothing after the first capital expenditure on the necessary fencing. So you see the outlay is most fully justified. I hope you'll enjoy some day a rasher of Jim Marshall's home-cured bacon."

"Well, you'll be the making of that country up the river. It was just such a man as you who was needed to leaven the whole sleepy bunch of fellows."

"Not Lavigne. Francois Lavigne is right in the front in his own particular line."

"That's so — there is no one to beat Lavigne for either wool or mutton. But most of the others in your neighborhood seem to have been born in Sleepy Hollow. But I guess you'll waken them up. When they see your prosperity, they'll want to follow your lead."

"And I'll be delighted to help them. The prosperity of all never fails to increase the prosperity of each individual."

"The true doctrine of modern enlightenment," concurred the banker. "Now I'll hand this check of yours to the cashier, and then you'll lunch with me. I always eat at home — my little bungalow is just around the corner. Didn't know I was married, eh? Sure. I not only found a banker's job in Yuma, but the prettiest little woman in all Arizona. She'll be glad to make your acquaintance, Marshall. So, come along."

A pleasant hour was passed in the O'Meara home, where, as O'Meara had predicted, Jim received the most cordial of welcomes from his truly attractive

hostess. After he had bidden her goodby and the two men had descended the steps of the front porch, the banker laid a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Come around the house," he said. "I want to show you something in my barn."

Wondering a little, Jim complied. O'Meara threw open the door of the barn, and pointed to a fine white and brown Jersey cow.

"An old friend of yours," he laughed. "The lady whose warm bed you appropriated that night on the desert. I'll never forget, old chap, the extraordinary picture you presented when you tumbled out of the hay."

"I have always remembered bossie with gratitude," smiled back Jim in return. "Her rich cream was like nectar of the gods to a famished man."

"The greatest milker I ever had," said O'Meara, as he patted the gentle animal's neck. "That's why I brought her along. There's nothing like sticking to a tried friend, eh?"

"But I suppose you don't keep open house for tramps any longer?" quizzed Jim.

"Not in Yuma, thank you," replied O'Meara with dry emphasis. He glanced at his watch and went on. "Gee, I must be getting back to the bank. But I've enjoyed your visit to my home. You must come again."

During the remainder of the afternoon Jim turned his attention to the other business matters that had brought him to the town. He gave a cash order at the leading hardware store that fairly took the owner's breath away, and entered into a contract for future

delivery of hog-tight wire fencing by the mile, to be paid for partly in cash and partly on time. For Jim Marshall was already too shrewd a business man to deplete his capital reserves unduly until returns were steadily coming in. Then there was lumber to be bought, also provisions and supplies of various kinds. Finally Jim visited an employment agency, and left instructions that every likely man of the type he required and described was to be sent along to the Marshall Rancho.

He had been in the saddle part of the night before. He had accomplished a hard day's work. But after just a few hours of sleep, he was once more astride his pony, riding in the moonlight on the northerly trail. Such was the restless energy of the man whose strength and endurance had been renewed as if he had drunk at the fabled well whose waters are an elixir of perennial youth.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM

ONCE again among the tiger-lilies and the cowslips — and this time the young lovers, Ned Collier and Bessie Gordon. They were alone in the little canyon, this bright sunny Saturday afternoon. For while sister Bernice in her unmarried days had submitted almost as a matter of course to the constant chaperonage of her mother, not so Miss Bessie. This young lady had developed very decided opinions of her own.

In any case her mother's accumulating engagements, what with teaching, women's clubs, and the social festivities at which she deemed it essential to make her presence felt, now rendered constant companionship between the two impracticable. But Bessie had solved the difficulty in a very decided way. On one occasion when an outing was being obstructed because Mrs. Gordon could not play escort for her daughter, the young lady had cut the Gordian knot by declaring that she was now of an age when she was perfectly able to take care of herself. It was open rebellion, but after a smart passage of arms the pretty little rebel had won out. Mrs. Gordon never again ventured to object to Ned's taking Bessie for a walk along the beach, or a run on the cars, or even to a picture show or a theatre.

Thus it had come about that they were alone in the canyon this particular afternoon, Ned's weekly half-holiday. The spot to Bessie was not only one of attractive beauty but of very hallowed memories. She always associated it with her beloved father, who had first taken her to the place in the days of her childhood, and had shown her the nooks where the tiger-lilies flaunted their gay blooms and the moist hollows where the sweet yellow cowslips nestled close to mother earth. She took delight in gathering bouquets of the two flowers, thinking all the time of her dear, dead daddy who, too, had loved them so well.

Ned knew her tender sentiment, and rejoiced in it, for somehow it seemed to bring them closer together here than amid any other surroundings. Today he had gathered the flowers and filled her lap with them as she sat upon a rock beside the murmuring stream. She had completed her task of arranging and tying the two splendid bouquets. Ned noticed the tears that had brimmed into her eyes.

"Thinking of your papa, Bessie?" he inquired gently, seating himself beside her and touching one of her hands.

"Yes," she replied. "I always think of him when we are in this canyon. Oh, I had such a dear daddy, Ned — so kind, so unselfish, so patient, such a hard-worker, although he was sick nearly all the time. I was never ashamed of his being only a shoe-pegger. Are you?"

"Of course not. The man who does a hard day's work, whatever it is, is only to be admired."

"But I begin to understand now why he was only

a shoe-pegger. It was for love of us — mother, Bernice, and me. He just had to earn money all the time to supply our requirements, and he never had the chance to look around for something bigger or better to do."

"Bigger, perhaps," corrected Ned. "Not better, Bessie dear."

She in turn patted his hand to show her appreciation that he understood her.

"That's true — not better. My! he was the finest shoe-pegger ever! How I used to watch his hammer go clap, clap, clap, fast like this"— she suited the action to the word —"his left hand slipping under a peg for every blow, and his eyes reading a book all the time. Wasn't it wonderful?"

Her tears were gone now, her face was aglow with the love and admiration that burned within.

"He was a noble daddy, Ned," she declared fervently. "I'll love him all my days. Mama wanted to buy me a gold watch for my last birthday. But I'll never wear any but the little gun-metal watch he used to wear."

As she spoke her hand strayed to her waist belt; she gave a little start, and paused, casting a downward glance at the place where a fob of black silk usually showed. It was not there at the present moment.

"This is the first time it ever happened," she said at last, glancing up at Ned with a half-smile of self-rebuke. "I left my watch this morning under my pillow."

"Oh, well, I've got my chronometer," laughed Ned, as he pulled out a stoutly-built watch. "Only silver, but the standard railroad man's watch — keeps time to

the fifth of a second. This is the ticker for me," he added with his accustomed enthusiasm.

"That's all right," she commented. "Neither of us need gold watches, do we? You need a good timekeeper, that's all. But even when my little watch gets worn down and old, I'm going to wear it all the same — just for love of my dear, kind daddy."

"By jove, your love is worth having, Bessie. What wouldn't I give for such love as that."

His voice trembled with the fervor of his words, he drew closer to her, again he caught hold of her hand.

Bessie's eyes dropped, a faint blush stole into her cheeks. But she did not withdraw her hand.

Emboldened, Ned slipped an arm around her waist.

"Bessie, Bessie, I love you. I have loved you from the first day I saw you. I never spoke about it because then you were only a child. But now it is different, and I can't keep back my thoughts any longer. I love you, I just love you with all the fire and passion of my soul."

He was bending over her now, his face close to hers.

"Bessie, darling, can you ever learn to love me?" Ned's voice was soft and pleading. "Dare I hope, sweetheart mine?"

There was a moment of tense silence. Then Bessie gave her answer. She simply raised her hands, placed them on his shoulders, and drawing his lips down to hers, bestowed the maiden's first kiss of fervid love. It told the whole story — for Ned it was the best and sweetest answer of all.

He rose to his feet, and lifted her up into his arms, hugging her close to his breast, kissing her again and again.

"I have loved you, Ned, all the time," she murmured, when at last he gave her the chance to speak and her upraised eyes gazed fondly into his.

"Then indeed I am the happiest man on all God's wide earth," he exclaimed as again he gathered the honey from her rose-bud lips.

About this very time Mrs. Gordon was dismissing a pupil from her studio — a rich young woman whom the artist tolerated because she paid a good fee and was of good social standing, but who would have been more usefully employed varnishing the kitchen chairs than attempting to paint on dainty porcelain. During the lesson Kioto had entered and deposited a little bunch of mail on a side table. Alone at last, Miriam dropped into a cosy chair close by, and reached forth a hand for the letters.

She was nonchalantly inspecting the envelopes when all of a sudden her interest was aroused. She had come to a familiar typewritten address and the familiar Sunset Overland Mail postmark, and now with trembling eagerness she ripped the cover open. Its contents were a yellow blank sheet of paper enfolding a currency bill — one hundred dollars.

"Another hundred-dollar bill!" she murmured to herself. "I thought it must have been a mistake last month when the first one came instead of the usual twenty dollars. But my unknown friend is apparently going to stick to the new sum. Well, this is luck. I'll be able to afford that Paris gown."

She let the money and the papers drop into her lap, and opened another letter. It was on dainty perfumed stationery — an invitation to some bridge party. A third letter also was languidly disposed of. But the next and last one again caused great excitement. It read as follows:

"Dear Mrs. Marsh Gordon:

"We have disposed of the six pieces of porcelain left with us some time ago on sale or return, and have orders for more of your beautiful work. We wish a further supply immediately, and are also desirous of entering into a permanent arrangement with you to be your exclusive agents. We think we can offer you attractive terms, so shall esteem it a favor if you give us a call the first day you happen to be in Los Angeles.

"Yours respectfully,

"Western Art Studios,

"per J. M., manager."

There was a flash of joy and triumph on Miriam's face as she read and re-read this communication. Her name recognized at last! Her fame established! The biggest art store in the city!

Already her eyes were roaming around and selecting from walls and brackets choice specimens of her artistic genius, which would certainly be packed at once for delivery first thing on Monday morning. Then she paused and reflected. Her keen business instincts were aroused.

"No, no. I must not show myself too eager"— this was the tenor of her musings. "I'll call about

Wednesday or Thursday, and first learn about prices. Then there must be a firm contract signed."

Just then Bessie burst into the room. Gathered in one arm were the glorious bouquets of cowslips and tiger-lilies.

"Mother dear, did you see my little gun-metal watch? I'm sure I left it under my pillow this morning."

"Why so excited, child, over such a trifle?" replied Miriam, with royal serenity. "You will find it over there on the mantelshelf."

Bessie darted across the room to recover her treasured possession, and Miriam seized the opportunity to pick up the one-hundred dollar bill and slip it out of sight, into the folds of her bosom.

When Bessie turned round again, her mother extended a hand.

"Read that letter from the Western Art Studios, Bessie. At last I have arrived."

She held forth the missive with the condescending smile of self-approved genius.

Bessie kissed her watch as she crossed the room. In passing she had laid down the flowers on the grand piano.

"I wouldn't lose my dear daddy's watch for all the world. I got such a fright when I didn't find it in my room. Well, let me read your letter. Then I've got some news for you, too, mama."

She drew a chair close to the small table and dutifully applied herself first of all to the communication from the art dealers.

"My warm congratulations, mama dear," said the

young girl, rising and kissing her mother affectionately on the brow. "You certainly deserve success after all these years of perseverance. And now I'm going to ask for your congratulations also. Oh, I just wish my dear daddy was here. I know he would be so happy. For he did love his little Bessie."

"Why are you always speaking about him?"

Miriam uttered the words with a sort of cold disdainfulness. The light died out of Bessie's face. She drew herself up erect, and for a moment surveyed her mother with a look of mingled pain and surprise. Then with a little sigh, she resumed her seat. But all the enthusiasm of her promised confidences seemed to have evaporated. Her eyes were grave now and still wondering.

CHAPTER XXIX

BESSIE SPEAKS HER MIND

"MOTHER," Bessie began seriously, "why should I not speak about my dear daddy just as often as I please?"

"There are reasons which you quite well know that render it undesirable — at least before other people. In the first place he was only a common shoe-pegger. Then again he was a consumptive. So when you keep pulling out that little gun-metal watch so that you may tell people it was your papa's, you only provoke inquiries. This, to say the least of it, is a very stupid thing to do. Even to me it simply serves to revive painful memories."

"But not to me," rejoined Bessie, sturdily. "My memories of papa are only dear memories. It makes me happy to have his watch under my pillow or at my belt, for its ticking seems to say that he is loving me all the time and just the same as if he was with us still. Didn't you love papa — love him with all your heart and soul?"

Bessie by now was in the mood to ask such fearless questions. She showed it by the determined tone in her voice, the determined look in her eyes.

Her mother half frowningly replied:

"Don't be foolish, child. Youthful love is one thing, but real attachment based upon fundamental principles of life is quite another."

"What do you mean, mama?" queried the young girl in wide-eyed wonder. "I am sure you really loved papa as all good wives love their husbands."

"Oh, yes," answered the mother, speaking in a semi-convincing, perfunctory fashion. "But, as I have said before, I don't like to see you going crazy over that watch and referring to it, no difference who happens to be here. You know, too, that your father had his faults."

"No, I don't," exclaimed Bessie, defiantly. "And this reminds me, as I grow older, that you have often talked in a half-critical way about my papa, and I don't like to hear you do so. It sounds as if you never truly loved him. Yet you know he took the most tender care of us to the very last so long as he was able to do a day's work. And I think that when a woman lives with a man she should keep mighty silent about his faults, if he has any."

"Whew!" murmured Miriam in surprise at the unlooked-for antagonism she had aroused. "One would think that my little Bessie was almost ready to be a wife herself."

"Well, who knows?" returned Bessie. "But when I get a husband I am going to stick to him through thick and thin, and love him whether we live in a castle or in a one-room shack 'way out on the desert."

"Oh, out on the desert, eh? That sounds a great deal like Ned Collier's experiences before he came to Los Angeles. I suppose he has been telling you all about love in a cottage and that sort of thing."

"Mama, I'm no longer a child," protested Bessie, with flaming eyes. "I am a woman now. I don't

like you to speak in that way about Ned. I never intend to let any cheap price tag be hooked onto my Ned."

"*Your* Ned!" exclaimed the mother in mild amazement. She arose from the chair and approaching the young girl laid a hand on her shoulder as if to soothe her excitement. "Come, come, Bessie. Don't show yourself so easily upset by little things."

"Little things!" blazed forth Bessie. "Why, I am Ned Collier's promised wife, and I want you to know that I accept all the responsibility that goes with our engagement. And I don't care whether Ned keeps his job or loses it — whether he is reduced to a lower salary or advanced to a higher one. It makes no difference to me, not one bit. I am his and he is mine, and we shall fight it out on this line until we are parted by death."

Bessie's announcement that she was engaged, the eager volubility with which she defended her lover, almost swept Miriam off her feet. But with a great effort she controlled her feelings, masking them by a smile.

"Romantic, very romantic," she said. "But when did this all come about? I have not even been consulted."

The little rebel was still up in arms.

"I know you haven't been consulted," she declared. "I am surely old enough now to decide for myself whom I really love and am going to marry. You have lots of things about which you don't consult me, or Bernice either. You never told us about that money poor papa gave you when he went away. But I found

out about the nine hundred dollars which you put into the bank the day after he left us. I have a girl friend who used to be a stenographer down there, and she told me about all those dimes. She was set to count them, and knew in a moment that they were dear daddy's savings, just as everyone else in the bank did."

Miriam flushed red with mingled surprise and humiliation. She was utterly at a loss to frame a reply. Bessie was in quieter mood now, but her voice was still quite determined as she continued:

"It doesn't really matter, mama, how you look on this engagement. It is a straight game of love between Ned and me, whether you are nice to us or not. And I have been true to the promise I gave you not to marry until I am twenty-one. I told Ned that, and he is quite contented to wait. But you must treat my Ned right. I am fighting for him from now on. I am on his side all the time, and he himself says I am his little pal, and always will be. When Ned and I are married —"

Miriam by now had recovered herself.

"When Ned and you are married!" she exclaimed with a toss of her head.

"That's all right, mother. If all goes well, it will be a formal wedding agreeable to you in about three years from now. But remember, it may be an elopement long before then if you don't treat your little Bessie right. When Ned and I are married," she repeated, "I am going to keep myself dressed up and just as attractive as any sweetheart can look. For I know Ned likes to see me neat and nice as if I had just stepped out of a band-box. And I am going to be a

good listener, too, to everything Ned says, and to believe everything he does say as just right. I won't be like that woman who was calling on you the other day and said she never could laugh at her husband's stories. I am going to laugh at Ned's stories, and I am going to like everything that Ned likes. I am going to like the movies he likes and the plays he likes, and I'm going to sing the songs he likes, and put the pieces he likes on the phonograph and play them for him."

Miriam listened but did not seek to interrupt as Bessie went on, nodding her head emphatically with each announced determination, just as if she had already studied over the problems of married life until in *her* mind at least they had been freed from all complexity.

"And there is just one other thing I am going to do. I am going to be the most amiable little wife that ever lived. I am going to keep on praising him for his hustling qualities, the positions he climbs to and the achievements he makes with his fellow men. I'll remind him at least twice a day how handsome and noble and brave and strong he is. That's what I'm going to do. And there is one thing certain — I'll never be a fault-finding and complaining nagger, but will just take pot luck with my Ned, whether it is plum-pudding or a crust of bread."

Miriam had flushed uncomfortably — she felt as if her own mental anatomy was being subjected to dissection.

"But what about your career, Bessie?" she managed to ask with seeming solicitude for her daughter's future.

"Career? Shucks! I would rather Ned and I had a little baby all our own than to be the greatest prima donna in the world. That's what I think of a career on the stage, about which you are always talking. One may mean lots of money, but the other means lots of love and happiness. Every good woman in the world, I think, needs a little chubby baby to keep her heart warm — to bring out the best within her."

"Well, come, I'll sit down again for a moment, and we'll talk things over in a practical sort of way. How much money has Ned saved? What are his prospects from his father in Arizona?"

So far from being conciliated by these questions, all the anger in Bessie's soul showed signs of flaring up again.

"I never even thought to ask him such things," she exclaimed indignantly. "Why do you always worry about money, mother? All I care to know, and I know it, is that my Ned has a good head, and better still a good heart."

Miriam knit her brows and gazed out of the window for quite a few moments. Then she turned to Bessie, and holding one of the girl's hands in both her own, said:

"Bessie, my dear child, I am naturally much astonished at what you have told me — about being engaged to Ned Collier. Not that I have any serious objection to him, although at the same time I think you could have made a far better choice from among your many admirers. But in any case I had supposed Ned would have consulted me before proposing to you."

"Why? He doesn't want to marry *you*."

Miriam bit her lip, but went on, still in an amicable manner.

"Well, it would have been the usual thing to do — perhaps the more honorable."

The mother had returned to dangerous ground, and Bessie was ablaze again in a moment.

"Don't even suggest that Ned can be dishonorable. Now just you mind that, mama. The proposal came quite naturally of itself this very afternoon, up in the little canyon among the foothills where we have often before gathered the tiger-lilies and the cowslips which my dear daddy used to love so much."

"I always knew I should not have let you two children go wandering about the hills alone."

But Bessie paid no heed to the remark.

"I do not mind being quite candid with you, mother," she continued. "I had been thinking of papa, and perhaps there were tears in my eyes. Ned was moved too, and he kissed me, and I'm not ashamed to say that I put my arms round his neck and kissed him in return. For we were meant to be for each other; we were lovers from the very first day we met. So Ned told me this very day. And I know it is true as regards myself. Now, that's plain talking, isn't it?"

"Very plain," replied Miriam acidly. "But it was my duty to have investigated Ned's financial prospects before you committed yourself, Bessie. An engagement is an engagement, remember."

"Oh, I won't forget, for I am proud of mine," retorted Bessie. "Ned Collier is strong up here"— she tapped her own beautiful curly head with a forefinger

—" so can never be a failure. And my, but he is also strong right here," she added, as she placed her plump little hand over her heart. " That's where he is stronger still and will always be, just as my good papa was."

" You seem to take after your papa. He was always a sentimentalist — an impracticable sentimentalist." The reference to her dead husband again had a touch of scorn.

" Then I'm glad to be a sentimentalist like him, and glad that my Ned is a sentimentalist, too. But there again, mother, you speak slightingly of papa. And I want to warn you — others notice the same thing. It makes them talk, too, and I am even beginning to hear that lots of people say you were not too good to your husband in any case."

Miriam paled to the very lips.

" Who dares to say that? " she faltered.

" Oh, never mind. People say it — that's enough. And it is right you should know, for it may teach you that a woman can never glorify herself by calling attention to her husband's faults."

" Teach me! " murmured Miriam, almost speechless at Bessie's audacity.

" It is never too late to learn," the girl continued tranquilly. " And as I am telling you a few things now, I may as well tell you some more — all for your own good, mama. You never introduced Burn Hopkins to daddy; you never did let them meet. I am older now and I know it wasn't right. And what's more, Bernice doesn't think it was right, nor Burn either."

"Have you been discussing your mother with Bernice and Burn?"

"No, but Burn has been talking it over with Bernice, and Bernice told me that Burn knew all the time that papa was working as a shoe-pegger and was almost dead from consumption. I like Burn all the more for that; it shows how truly he loved Bernice. He is a real gentleman, and so was daddy, too, even though he did cobble shoes all his life so that he might provide for us — Bernice, you, and me. These things wouldn't be spoken about now if you had treated poor papa right and been kind to him. And I don't believe he went away because of the consumption at all." Bessie gave a little sob; her eyes filled. "It was a broken heart — that's what made him leave us." And she burst into tears, weeping inconsolably as she bent down over the little table.

A spell of silence followed. Then all of a sudden Bessie rose and, still weeping, left the room.

Miriam sat with folded hands, thinking it all over. She felt crushed and humiliated. The secret of the money that her husband had left her was now open talk on the streets. Then, too, Burn knew the truth about Marsh Gordon's occupation and ailments. And she alone had been kept in ignorance of all this publicity. She was embarrassed, indignant, ashamed.

"I never knew Bessie had such a temper," she whispered to herself. "But she takes it from her father. In his early years I have seen him in tantrums, although never with me, I must confess."

Confession is proverbially good for the soul. Already Miriam was a little softened.

"Perhaps I didn't use him just right," she sighed, as she rested an elbow on the table and covered her eyes with her hand.

A few minutes sped. Miriam glanced up when the door again opened. It was Bessie returning with a big glass pitcher in her hands.

"Water for my beautiful flowers," she explained, as she proceeded to arrange the tiger-lilies in a vase. Next the cowslips were set in a great china bowl.

Her task completed, Bessie stood silent for awhile. Miriam was still in her pensive attitude. The young girl contemplated her, then glided to her side, bent over her, and kissed her brow affectionately.

"We mustn't regret the past too much, mama dear," she murmured. "We can only resolve to do better in the future."

CHAPTER XXX

A PATRON OF ART

FRANCOIS LAVIGNE'S home was remarkable in several respects. The exterior presented nothing out of the common, excepting, perhaps, that the extensive and beautiful flower garden showed pains and care not usually bestowed on floral luxuries in an arid region where results must necessarily depend on irrigation at frequent and regular intervals. The house was simply a plain and commodious framework building with broad verandas on three sides, these clothed with rose vines that bloomed all through the year. But the interior was notably different from the usual rancher's home in the Far West.

On the walls of the big living room hung pictures that would have conferred distinction on any city home, masterpieces from the brushes of well-known artists, representing a very substantial outlay of capital, if that consideration had ever entered into their owner's mind. For Lavigne, if only a sheep-breeder and wool-grower, was a Frenchman to the tips of his fingers, and therefore a true lover of art in all its forms. This was further evidenced by an occasional porcelain or bronze on brackets and by the rich oriental rugs that covered the floor. Even the furniture was of the dainty French type, in contrast to the heavy Old

Mission chairs and tables so generally favored in California.

On the sideboard in the dining room were displayed several massive silver cups, trophies of Lavigne's success at agricultural shows, where his fine Rambouillet stock had been always in the prize-winning class until in later years, his fame established, he had withdrawn from such contests. In an adjoining cabinet was a complete set of crystal of beautiful pattern. For Francois kept a diversified wine cellar, and dearly loved to sip the purple or amber juice of the grape from the appropriate glasses to which his younger days in his native France had accustomed him. The artist again, even in the matter of table appurtenances.

But the most delightful feature of the Frenchman's home was his good wife Hortense. She made no pretence of being anything more than of the peasant class. But she was the paragon of housewives, devoted to her home, proud of its treasures, never tired of keeping everything in spic-and-span orderliness. As regards cooking, she was a chef of the highest rank. Besides all this she was pretty in her plump petiteness, and with her sparkling black eyes she always looked bright and cheerful. Lavigne had gone back to France to marry her, his first and only sweetheart, and as the devoted couple invariably spoke French to each other and passed their lives virtually alone, Hortense had never acquired anything more than a smattering of English. But her quaint broken speech, when necessity compelled her to attempt the language, quite added to her many charms.

To Jim Marshall, life in this happy home was almost a revelation. No care, no anxiety, no petty bickering,

no worry of any kind; all smiles and serenity from morning to night; never a harsh expression, never a frown; affectionate words and looks and little displays of tenderness at all times. It had not been a childless home — only children could have brought about these mellowing influences of mutual understanding and forbearance. But the boys and girls were away now in their own little worlds, married, rearing their own broods, but regularly in correspondence with the dear old folks in the dear old home. Hortense would often point with motherly love and pride to the family portraits that adorned the dainty boudoir where she did her sewing and mending, during what she was pleased to call her " idle hours."

Under Lavigne's tuition, Jim Marshall was not only beginning to play a good game of chess, but he was even applying himself to the French tongue. For the love of knowledge was engrained in his soul, the chance to learn was ever to him a privilege, the process of learning never a labor but a delight. So he was soon beyond the stage of elementary instruction, and was now beginning both to understand and speak the language that was in constant use by his host and hostess.

One evening after dinner, out on the front porch, the three friends were opening a bulky package that had arrived by postal rural delivery during the day. Several layers of cardboard had been set aside, and now an abundant packing of excelsior was being carefully picked out by Hortense's deft fingers. At last she produced a piece of china — a plaque for hanging on the wall. It was a reproduction of an old classical pastoral scene — French shepherds and shepherdesses,

hand-painted obviously, a work of art if not exactly a masterpiece. Hortense held it admiringly at arm's length.

"Very pretty," she exclaimed in French. "Very, very pretty."

Francois took it from her hand and bestowed a critical scrutiny.

"Yes, not half bad," he commented, addressing Jim in English. "But you tell me the lady is an American, and lives in California. Why does she not do something original then? Why copy French designs when there are all the beauties of the West for inspiration — mountains, rivers, lakes, trees and flowers and birds? Too bad; she paints well enough not to be a mere imitator."

"Perhaps she has not the genius of originality?" suggested Jim with a quiet smile. "All the same, Francois, as I told you, I have taken a fancy to her work, and am going to buy a good deal of it."

"La, la!" cried Hortense, producing a vase from among the excelsior, and bestowing on it a glance of commendation. In quick succession there followed four other pieces, making an assortment of six in all. In each case the technical art was good, but the design was invariably a copy or a mere convention.

"Be advised by me," said Francois, summing up Jim's purchases. "A collection of this kind has no chance to enhance in value."

"Oh, I am not estimating cash values or thinking of reselling," explained the art patron. "I wish to do this lady, Miriam Gordon, a good turn. See, here are her initials in the corner — M. G." He had a bowl in his

hand, and was pointing to the tiny pink monogram. "But as I have said she must not know that I am the purchaser. Nor must the Western Art Studios through whom you have bought disclose even your name to her."

"I made that clear in my letter — I made it a condition of future purchases. And I also said I would be prepared, if necessary, to better present prices by a hundred per cent."

"Then have you got the invoice for this first consignment?"

"Yes, it came three days ago." Francois slipped a hand into his coat pocket, and sorted out the required paper from among a little bunch of letters.

"One hundred and twenty dollars," read Jim aloud. "That's surely reasonable — twenty dollars apiece."

As he spoke his hand went to his money belt, from which he produced a wad of currency. He counted out the required sum, and passed it over to Francois.

"So, Francois, my dear fellow, you'll remit the amount to that studio firm by your own check. And until I build my home, I am sure that my good friend Hortense will take care of my hand-painted porcelain treasures."

"Surely, surely," exclaimed Francois, conveying the request to Hortense in French.

Hortense replied in the same language, and Jim understood her without aid of an interpreter.

"With the greatest of pleasure, monsieur. In my own boudoir. I have a cabinet there that will serve admirably."

There and then they carried the porcelain indoors,

and within a few minutes the six pieces were arranged to best advantage on the shelves of the cabinet. The brightly colored china certainly added to the attractiveness of an already attractive room. Hortense was delighted.

"Very nice, very pretty," she kept repeating as she surveyed the new adornments from all possible angles.

A day or two later Miriam was calling on the manager of the Western Art Studios. She condescendingly accepted the firm's check for ninety dollars, although she declared that a twenty-five per cent commission was highway robbery to which she could not possibly submit much longer.

"But we are selling to your very best advantage, madame," explained the manager suavely. "Indeed we think if you agree to deal through us exclusively, we can now safely advance your prices by fifty per cent, and a little later on by fifty per cent more. We are consigning today at the enhanced rate these last ten pieces you sent from your home, and will have another check for you by the end of the month."

"Who are the buyers?" asked Miriam, with eagerness she tried to conceal.

"We never disclose names without direct authority from the purchasers," was the discreet reply.

"Oh, it really doesn't matter," said Miriam nonchalantly. "In true art there can be absolute indifference as to where one's best work goes on its mission of conferring pleasure. Good afternoon, Mr. Mains."

But as she swept from the office she was holding tight to her purse, congratulating herself on the ninety dollars within, sorely begrudging the thirty dollars sac-

rificed to commission, and hungering in her heart for direct communication with the patrons of her art so that future spoliations of this kind might be avoided.

The selfish woman is not infrequently so important in her own estimation that she stands in her own light and permits opportunities to pass by unseen, so that her very ignorance becomes the mausoleum of her reputation.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE GREAT ROUND-UP

THE shuttle of time, tireless, unrelaxing, inexorable, had gone on weaving the days into weeks, the weeks into months, and the months into years. In the words of Omar Khayyam:

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

Almost four years had been woven into the fabric of eternity — had written their story into the annals of the irrevocable past.

For the young lovers, Ned Collier and Bessie Gordon, they had been years of maturing mentality, of happy and beautiful companionship, of deepening trust and affection, of contented and uncomplaining waiting for the fruition of their fond hopes and dreams. For Miriam they had been years of supreme complacency; she had earned steady and substantial remuneration from her artistic work, the contributions from her mysterious benefactor had been continued with unfailing regularity and steadily increasing liberality, her position in society and among her women's clubs had been established with the security that financial pros-

perity most readily achieves. For Jim Marshall on his cattle ranch they had been years of unremitting toil, of keen-eyed vigilance, of accumulating prosperity and wealth beyond all the initial calculations he had ventured to set down as possible of realization.

The Marshall Rancho was now one of the show-places of California. The 1280 acres of homestead lands presented a great unbroken expanse of verdure, surrounded and conveniently subdivided by close-meshed wire fencing, criss-crossed by irrigation ditches; bright green stands of alfalfa pasturage alternating with tall growths of Kaffir corn, succulent sorghum, the nodding plumes of millet and other rich feeding stuffs; with here and there mighty stacks of baled hay, and everywhere dotted over the landscape herds of fattening beeves and veritable armies of hogs grubbing the roots and garnering the scattered seeds where the cattle had fed in front of them — a picture of nature's boundless productivity under the stimulating and careful guidance of man's highest intelligence. Around the big central reservoir, bordered and shaded by an inviting growth of willow trees, were usually congregated, morning and evening, droves of the breeding cows that roamed the foothills and canyons in the back country, these free foragers having acquired the habit of descending on occasion to cool their feet in the pleasant water and partake of its perennial abundance.

Within a little distance of the modest cottage which served the owner of the great ranch as dwelling place and office, were the bunk-houses of the agricultural laborers, the great sheds that housed their plows, culti-

vators, and wagons, the original log-cabin of the Reilly-Burke days, where the now numerous band of cowboys ate and slept, the corrals where their ponies rested, the massively constructed yards where the stock at regular intervals were drafted and sorted out — the calves for branding, the three-year-old steers for pasturing so that they might be finally "topped-up" for the beef markets, the old and worn out breeders for the discard at the best price attainable for hoofs, horns, and hide.

Altogether a marvelous transformation wrought by industry, foresight, and, what the banker O'Meara had so tersely characterized as the best of all land fertilizers, brains!

In the spring of each year was the great annual round-up, when the vast roaming herds on the range, together with every stray maverick that had hitherto escaped the branding iron, were driven in for stock-taking purposes. This had come to be a notable event for all the countryside. The last day was invariably attended by the small ranchers from a wide radius, together with their wives and daughters. It had grown to be a sort of gala day, on which Jim Marshall dispensed unbounded hospitality, rival cowboys competed for prizes in contests for lariat throwing and steer roping, and the festivities closed with a dance for the young people in one of the big barns, festooned for the celebration with flags and gay bunting. Strangers were made welcome; the spirit of friendship and brotherhood reigned supreme.

On the present occasion Jim had noticed the presence of a sharp-featured little man whose clothes be-

spoke the city rather than the open air life. This individual was clearly of an inquiring turn of mind — he had inspected the main buildings and the outbuildings; the reservoir, the pasturages, the herds of cattle, the droves of hogs, the scores of nimble cow-ponies, some on duty, the others in the corrals. He had even asked for a guide and ascended the little canyon to the source of the water supply. Nothing seemed to have escaped his attention.

It was afternoon, the last figures about the stock had been entered in the ranch owner's note book, the sports had begun, and Jim was strolling around the ring, chatting with friends and neighbors, occasionally patting a child on the head, exchanging a word with the mother, sometimes causing the young girls to blush by his good-humored compliments, making everybody feel that they were welcome guests of the rancho. After a while he strolled away toward a big pit where two prime fat beeves were being cooked for the barbecue that would follow the contests and displays of cowboy skill and daring.

He was inquiring of the boss cook how things were progressing when the inquisitive stranger drew near. He was still on the quest for information.

"Would you be so kind as to give me the exact figures of your stock, Mr. Marshall?" he asked, producing a memorandum book from his pocket.

Jim had already scented what was in the air. He smiled and from memory enumerated the different classes of stock — breeding cows and blooded bulls, these last of highest grade pedigree stock that had been specially brought in at intervals from Wyoming and

Colorado; three-year-olds, two-year-olds, and calves; hogs, cow-ponies, mules and draught horses.

"Now, we'll check these figures off from my record," Jim added, bringing forth his own note book, "just to make sure that I have made no error."

There was no error; the tally had been absolutely accurate.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind speaking with me for a few minutes in your office?" requested the stranger.

"Certainly not," answered Jim as he led the way.

Soon they were seated in the office, unpretentiously furnished — big roller-top desk, a safe in one corner, a telephone on the wall, and curiously enough an old battered sombrero of the tall Mexican type suspended at the window as if it had been a pot of ferns.

The visitor glanced at this strange adornment with a look of unconcealed questioning.

"Just a fancy of mine," explained Jim laughingly. "For memory's sake — the gift long ago of a mighty good friend — my mascot, I sometimes think, as I have often told him. Now please be seated. What can I do for you?"

"Here is my business card," the other began after taking the chair beside the desk, the top of which Jim had already thrown up. "You will see that I represent the biggest firm of packers in Kansas City. But I have full credentials with me, if we can arrive at an understanding. Excuse me for a minute or two; I wish to do a little figuring."

Jim drew out the sliding board of the desk for the visitor's convenience. The proffer of a writing pad was declined; the note book with its record of the stock-

taking was again brought forth and utilized for the task of ciphering. The computation was rapidly made, and the book was closed with a smart snap.

"We'll pay you $350,000 for the entire shooting match — stock, land and improvements, water rights, everything as the place stands today thrown in — purely personal belongings of course excepted."

It was a king's ransom, and the offer had come with startling suddenness. But Jim Marshall betrayed no surprise or excitement — not even by the quiver of an eyelash.

"Cash?" he asked quietly.

"Cash down," was the prompt reply. "I have brought with me a certified check for $250,000 drawn by the firm, and you can wire our bankers that my personal check for the balance will be at once honored."

The certified check was presented for Jim's inspection; it was already drawn in his favor.

"You certainly do business in rapid style, Mr. Scott," smiled Jim. "How do you know I am ready to sell?"

"Oh, I looked over your property a year or so ago. You happened to be down in Yuma at the time, but I saw enough to satisfy me. I am not here to dicker over terms. I had no idea that you had so many head of stock. I have simply figured out present market values. I know to a dot what these cattle are worth to my firm today on the hoof. Nor have I forgotten to take into account that the branch railroad from Submarine Junction has at last been begun and will, when completed, reduce the costs of shipping. So you see everything has been calculated, fairly and squarely.

It only remains for you to accept or decline my offer. I won't raise it by a dollar."

"Oh, I am not for dickering any more than yourself, my friend," responded Jim. "I recognize that it is a mighty fine price for me when I consider what I paid for the place only four years ago."

"Nobody can begrudge you your profit, Mr. Marshall. I remember the old ranch when Reilly and Burke owned it. If it had remained in their thriftless hands its present value would be nearer $35,000 than $350,000, even with the price of cattle gone up close on fifty per cent since four years ago. The splendid developments are yours. When I first heard that you had put in a private telephone wire to Yuma, I knew you were going to make a big thing of it."

"It has been my particular business to watch the markets day by day. That's why I know now that your offer is a fair one."

"Then you accept it?"

"Yes, it's a deal," replied Jim as he pushed back his chair. "This check on account is all the credentials I require. We'll just draw up a memorandum of agreement as to the payment of the balance."

Jim stepped over to the typewriting machine, adjusted paper and carbon, and set himself to his task. The man from Kansas City watched, following the quick tap, tap, tap of the keys, the unhesitating choice of words. And a few minutes later, too, he wondered when he read a properly drawn legal agreement, expressed in crisp, terse, and professional terms.

"You are certainly a marvel," exclaimed the party of the second part after a careful perusal of the docu-

ment. "I did not know that you were a lawyer."

The party of the first part smiled.

"A bit of a Jack-of-all trades, eh? Well, when need drives even the dullard may learn. Now I'll get a couple of witnesses to our signatures."

He rose, advanced to the open door, and promptly called out:

"Hallo, Francois, the very man I wanted. Come here, and bring Hortense with you."

A moment later Mr. and Mrs. Lavigne entered. Brief introductions were made. The signatures were duly attested without explanations asked by or given to the witnesses. The Marshall Rancho was sold, although for the moment Jim's good neighbors did not know it.

Marshall locked the completed document and the certified check in the safe.

"May I use your phone?" asked the visitor. "I want to telegraph to Kansas City."

"Certainly," was the laughing reply. "The place is yours or your firm's. We shall drink to the health of the new owners of the Rancho tonight at the barbecue."

"Jim — you haven't sold out? — we are not going to lose you?" exclaimed Lavigne, anxiously and regretfully.

Marshall laid a hand affectionately on the Frenchman's shoulder.

"True friends never lose each other, Francois, although they may be parted. But I won't be very far away and we'll visit each other often — don't you worry about that. Come with me now. I'll tell you

all about the deal. We shall leave Mr. Scott to get through with his telephoning."

Two days later a telegram came through to the Rancho. It was from Ned Collier.

"It's all in the newspapers, and I am wild with joy. They say you have cleaned up a round million. Congratulations, dear old boy."

The reply that went out ran as follows:

"The newspaper figures are away off. But never mind; a mighty fine deal. I am leaving for Phoenix to carry out my long-standing promise of making acquaintance with your good old dad and I hope your kind mother also.

"Everlastingly yours, JIM."

CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE CITY OF PHOENIX

A YEAR later Jim Marshall was seated in a sumptuously furnished lawyer's office in the city of Phoenix, Arizona. Mahogany desk, table, and chairs, a fine red Turkish rug, a handsome bookcase containing a compact legal library, all suggested good taste combined with opulence. Jim had a big, sheep-bound volume before him on the desk, and while he read he made occasional notations on a sheet of paper by his side. His attitude was a studious one, he was intent on his occupation, even though he was not alone in the room.

A man in his shirt sleeves and wearing an apron was quietly painting an inscription on the glass panel of the door. His task was almost completed, for he opened the door and read the lettering from the outside to assure himself that everything was correct. Still leaving the door open, he approached the desk deferentially.

"Would you kindly glance at this, sir? I think it is all right."

Jim rose, crossed the room, and read the inscription:

–205–
COLLIER AND MARSHALL
Attorneys-at-Law

JAMES MARSHALL
PRIVATE
Inquire at General Offices, Room 204

Jim spelled over the words and assented that everything was in order. The man gathered up his pot of paint, mahl-stick, and other belongings, and withdrew, closing the door behind him. Jim remained standing near the middle of the room. His eyes were still on the now reversed lettering. A smile of satisfaction broke over his countenance, and he murmured to himself half-aloud:

"Well, well, wonders will never cease. To think that I, once the absolute down-and-outer, am now a full-fledged attorney, admitted to practice at the bar, partner of such a man as Ledgerwood Collier. Four years at Submarine, four years on the rancho, one year here — nine years in all. Just one year more, then the term of my ordeal will be completed. Won't Miriam be amazed — delighted, I should say, too, when she beholds me so completely transformed?"

He moved over to the mantel and surveyed himself in the mirror, not with any thought of vanity, just in a spirit of thankful contentment. The intellectual-looking, clean-shaven face, rotund and full yet with clearly-cut features; the broad shoulders; the proudly erect carriage; the immaculate collar and necktie, the latter with a single pearl for stick-pin; the abundant hair

peppered with the grey that gave an added touch of dignity to his presence — all might have made any man on the borderland of sixty mighty proud of himself. But Jim's heart was only filled with gratitude to the divine Providence that had restored him to health and raised him to abundant prosperity, and while he surveyed the personage in the mirror he was contrasting it with the well remembered picture he had presented nine years before — the emaciated cheeks, the hollow eyes, the scanty locks, the stooping shoulders, the shrinking, apologetic, timid mien of the man who knows himself to be both a physical and a social derelict.

Just a little over a year ago Jim Marshall had transferred his personal belongings from the rancho to the state capital of Arizona. He had come there only with vaguely defined intentions. But he knew that the climate would suit him — the dry desert climate that had restored him to perfect health and to which he was determined to stick for the rest of his days. Then he felt sure that he would find congenial companionship of a higher intellectual quality than was possible out on the desert. It was Ned Collier's father, however, who was the real lodestone that had drawn him to Phoenix.

During the days at Submarine Ned had spoken so frequently, fondly, and admiringly of his "dear old dad" that Jim had seemed to know him well before they met. And Ledgerwood Collier, when the two men at last came to clasp hands, declared that he already counted Jim Marshall as an intimate friend, for Ned's letters had told him all about his scholarship,

fine thoughts, and splendid influences on the lad himself during the period of their comradeship. Ned had long ago informed his father of the solemn promise he had exacted from Jim that the latter should some day journey to Phoenix and make the acquaintanceship of his parents. So the visit was counted simply as the payment of a long overdue debt, and Jim was promptly transferred from the hotel where he had taken up quarters to the hospitable Collier home.

There, during the two weeks of his visit, he delighted both the mother and the father with his reminiscences and accumulated news about their son. For although Ned and Jim had been parted all these years, the weekly interchange of letters had never been interrupted. And Jim was really Ned's one confidant, so he was able to tell the old folks at home some things they had not known before.

They had already been made acquainted with Ned's engagement to Bessie Gordon. Jim felt quite empowered and competent to expatiate on the beauty of the young lady, her charms and accomplishments, her splendid voice, her mastery of the piano. He even described Bessie's mother in flattering terms — her social distinction, her genius for painting, her well-balanced mind that had made her quite a leader among the women of the West. Then Bernice and Burn Hopkins were also referred to approvingly, and the impression left on the minds of Mr. and Mrs. Ledgerwood Collier was that their son Ned was a lucky fellow indeed, marrying into such a distinguished family.

The incident that the dead father, Marsh Gordon, was never referred to during these conversations inflicted no selfish pang on Jim Marshall. His face always glowed with pleasure when he was singing the praises of Miriam, Bernice, and Bessie. The Colliers were just a trifle jealous that Ned had sent to him so much more detailed information than to them. But Jim explained it all with that wonderfully sweet smile of his and the endearingly spoken words: "Ah, but Ned and I were chums — we are yet — real chums." And the man's great love for the boy that so obviously filled his soul endeared him greatly to Ned's parents.

Early during the visit Ledgerwood Collier had discovered to his surprise that Jim Marshall's favorite reading was law, and that he already possessed a small but useful library of legal books, the careful study of which was made manifest by the marginal notes and the underscores that were present on nearly every page. This had prompted an almost random remark by the attorney:

"Man alive, why don't you take to the law? You are already better equipped than many men I know practising today at the Arizona bar."

The seed had been sown on fertile ground; it quickly germinated.

"How long before I could be admitted to the practice of law in the State of Arizona?" inquired Jim the very next morning.

"Oh, you must have been a resident in the State for a full year before you can take the examination. So you will have to wait till the expiry of that period.

But I do believe you could pass the examination right away, after just a little study perhaps of the actual practice of the law."

This conversation had had quite momentous results. Jim became a student of law in Mr. Collier's own offices, assiduously reading, working on cases and preparing briefs under the attorney's guidance, although not, of course, taking any active part in the trials; also attending the law courts regularly as a keenly interested listener and watcher of procedure.

At the end of a year he had passed the required examination with flying colors and been admitted to the bar. The first result of this was the inscription that had just been painted on the glass panel: "COLLIER AND MARSHALL: ATTORNEYS-AT-LAW." For the two men, now fast friends, had entered into partnership immediately Jim was qualified so to do.

There had been a little discussion about the name "Jim." Its owner clung to it tenaciously for a time, but ultimately a decision had been arrived at that "James" was the only possible form to appear upon an attorney's office door and professional card. So Jim Marshall had at last blossomed forth as "Mr. James Marshall," although to all his friends and associates he remained just plain and simple "Jim." The abbreviated name was the badge of his popularity, the seal of the affection which his personality inspired in every quarter where he made acquaintances.

Jim had turned from the mirror and once more was settling himself at his desk when Ledgerwood Collier entered the room by the side door communicating with the general offices. He was a handsome, florid, dis-

tinguished-looking man, perhaps just a few years older than his new partner.

"Hello, Jim," Collier began. "I have been signing a check for that painter fellow. So you've hung out your shingle at last"—pointing to the door. "Congratulations, and all good luck, old fellow."

Jim had risen and, taking the proffered hand, responded with a fervent handshake.

"Yes, I'm feeling fairly launched on my new career. Thanks for your kind words. But I owe everything to you, Collier, as regards this law business. It is you who have helped me over all difficulties."

"Stuff and nonsense! Instead of congratulating you, Jim, in point of fact I should be congratulating myself. Almost from the start here, you became indispensable to me. While you have been nominally attending school, you have prepared scores of cases for me better than I could have done for myself. You have thus enabled me to get into the political game in a way that would have been impossible otherwise. And now that you are a full-fledged partner, my hands during the coming year will be freer still. Walter Bacon assures me that I'll carry the state for Governor. He had a telegram last night from Prescott saying that the party there is solid for me, and I know myself that only another rousing meeting in Douglas is required to swing the voters of that county into line. I'm just telling you this, Jim, to show you how most of the court work will fall on your shoulders until the election is over. I must be up and doing and beating around, all the time."

Jim smiled pleasedly.

"I'm glad of your confidence, Collier. You know I'll do my best to help you, both as regards the firm's work and also to secure your nomination. I do believe," Jim went on with a smile, "there is a little bit of the war-horse in me after all. Did you hear me cheering you last night? It was certainly a great speech you gave us. I forgot that I wasn't at a base-ball game."

Both men laughed.

"Which reminds me, Jim, that we are due at the Elks' gathering tonight. You haven't forgotten about your election, have you? And I hope you've profited by the private tip I gave you, to be ready with a few appropriate remarks after your initiation — about the flag, you know, and so forth."

"I have never been accustomed to public speaking," replied Jim, in a somewhat diffident tone. But his look quickly brightened. "However, as an attorney now, I am committed to the game. And, somehow, I'm not afraid."

"No need to be, that's certain," remarked his partner. "Well, I'll come round to your hotel just before seven. We'll go together to the hall. Remember, it's a dress affair. Oh, you'll meet a jolly bunch of good fellows and have a great night."

James Marshall now occupied a fine suite of rooms in the best hotel in town. There he was enabled to live comfortably and on occasion to entertain his friends, without any of the worries of bachelor housekeeping.

By seven o'clock he was in evening clothes and ready for his friend and sponsor to the brotherhood of Elks.

It proved a notable event for the new member. After his initiation with his class of novitiates, and the various secret ceremonies appertaining thereto, just as Collier had discreetly warned him, the new members were called upon for a few words. When Jim's turn came, he spoke without notes, with no labored signs of preparation, just simply and naturally yet with an inspired eloquence that held his audience spellbound. His beautiful well-trained voice of the old singing days had long since returned, and it was with the finely modulated, rotund notes of a born orator that he gave expression to the sentiments that animate all true Elks. His speech was punctuated by cheers, while his peroration evoked a veritable whirlwind of applause. It was in the following terms:

"Friendship between man and man is the underlying principle of this great organization — the inspiration, the motive that impelled the founding of the Order of Elks, an institution that within a few brief years has so commended itself to American manhood that its lodges are now to be found throughout the length and breadth of our beloved country and have followed the national flag into our distant overseas possessions.

"An organization — a brotherhood — which has appealed to the highest intelligence and spoken to the hearts of men, loyal American citizens, in accents of truth and wisdom, is certainly entitled to our devotion and to the respect of mankind universal. Friendship, my brothers, has ever contributed to the highest ideals of honor and to the development of the sub-

limest qualities of the soul. Friendship is the genius of all greatness, humanity, and progress; indeed, it is a 'something' that pulses in the heart rather than a sentiment that can be defined by words.

"I have sometimes thought that if we could place in our souls a harp so delicately attuned that every gale of passion, of hope, of sorrow, of love and of joy, could sweep over its chords, then we would hear, in low, plaintive whisperings, the melody of friendship's sweetest song; and from what I have witnessed here tonight, methinks that every good Elk has a harp within his soul and likewise a soul within his harp.

"Within my hands I hold an emblem which you have given me tonight. Let us not forget the sacrifices our forefathers made for this priceless talisman, this thing of beauty and joy forever, symbol of freedom, ensign of liberty — our glorious and immaculate flag."

Jim was not aware that his address had been taken down in shorthand, by the secretary of the lodge who happened to be also an official reporter at the law courts. No sooner had the speaker resumed his seat than a motion was put to the assemblage that "the splendid oration to which we have just listened"— so ran the words of the resolution — should be printed and sent to the members of every lodge of Elks in Arizona.

There was, naturally, widespread newspaper publicity as well, and in this way it came about that the name of James Marshall, the new law partner of the already celebrated Ledgerwood Collier, popular candidate for the governorship, was soon known in all

important centres of population throughout the state. In Phoenix, his home for over a year, he had already established his reputation as a man of high ability, of indubitable rectitude, and — perhaps not the least important consideration — of abundant means.

Before coming to Phoenix Jim, through the medium of his good friend, Banker O'Meara, had discreetly and wisely, nothwithstanding the high rates of interest in the Far West, converted $300,000 of his cash into United States Government bonds. While these bonds earned only a comparatively moderate income as compared with many western gilt-edged investments he might have made with but little speculative risk, nevertheless he had the satisfaction of knowing that his security was absolute, and his interest punctually paid at regular intervals and in amount far exceeding his personal requirements.

Even then, with nearly $100,000 made up from the accumulated profits of the rancho and the balance of the sale price of stock and land, he was one of the richest citizens of Phoenix, keeping, from motives of fairness and shrewd policy, a substantial credit balance at every bank in the city, always ready to give liberal financial backing to any local enterprise of reasonable promise, and never hesitating — so it came to be said, although he himself divulged nothing about such matters — to bestow generous help on those who were down in their luck or temporarily embarrassed.

One of his early local investments had been in eighty acres of orchard land just beyond the city limits, a fine property on which he intended eventually to build a home. Meanwhile a skilled manager was

in charge. A novel feature of this place was a "Travellers' Rest-House," as Jim called it. Here the tramp, willing to work, was given good accommodation, board, and pay, helped to a permanent job if he desired and deserved it, or passed on his way with a few honestly earned dollars in his pocket.

Thus within the single year of his residence in Arizona, James Marshall, with no deliberate effort on his part and almost unbeknown to himself, had spread his fame far and wide among rich and poor alike. The well-to-do looked upon him as a buttress of strength to the whole community; the down-and-outers as a veritable Godsend, the true humanitarian, the kindly helper in many cases to recovered self-respect and a new start in life. So his name was blessed, in the very fullest meaning of the good old Scriptural phrase.

The reason some men tower so high above their fellows is that they are possessed of that peculiar combination of brain and heart that causes them almost unconsciously to stoop low, even to the grass roots of humanity, and, sharing in their hopes and fears, sympathize at all times with the humble and oppressed.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE NEW GOVERNOR OF ARIZONA

WITHIN a very few weeks after his admission to legal practice, James Marshall had fully established his reputation as a lawyer — indeed he had leaped into the position of one of the acknowledged leaders at the Phoenix bar.

With him, however, the mere earning of money or professional fame was quite a secondary consideration. He had not only become greatly attached to Ledgerwood Collier on the latter's own account, but deep down in Jim's heart there lurked the feeling of loyalty to Ned — the very feeling that had almost unconsciously to himself brought him to Phoenix. To Ned Collier, who away out there on the desert had taken him in and made a comrade of him in the hour of direst distress, he owed everything he possessed. Ned needed no help, and had shown himself too proudly sensitive to accept anything even suggesting repayment for the priceless services he had rendered.

But for Jim there was a way out. Ned loved his father, held him in highest admiration, would count any triumph for " the old man " as a triumph for himself, the son. So anything done for Ledgerwood Collier would be done for Ned. Along this line of direction Jim saw a chance partly to discharge his debt of gratitude — not from any petty motive of freeing him-

self from the sense of obligation but out of loyal love for the youth who had been his aid and benefactor.

Therefore as the time for the nomination of candidates at the ensuing election drew near, Jim freed his hands by declining a number of court cases, and, to the delight of Ledgerwood Collier, announced his intention of stumping the state with him and rendering the fullest help possible. Collier had come to know the wonderful magnetic influence of the man. The voluntary offer really anticipated a request he had been on the verge of venturing, and it was most gladly accepted.

In every town they visited James Marshall's name was already more or less known, and it only required one of his pungent vigorous addresses from the rostrum to win for him enthusiastic and assured popularity. At first, from the old shyness born of a naturally retiring disposition, he had wanted to be only a supporter of the candidate — to leave to Ledgerwood Collier and the other trained party leaders the oratorical prominence that was rightfully theirs. But when Collier had promptly discovered that Marshall could sway an audience as could no other man in his following — could, at will, rouse them to frantic enthusiasm or hush them to not less impressive stillness — he was well content to thrust this new recruit to his cause right into the forefront of the battle line. Collier had no spark of jealousy in his mental make-up. He had his own individual ambitions, naturally. But it was for his party and its political faith that he was fighting, and the most effective weapon for the achievement of victory was the one weapon to be employed, irrespective of all personal considerations.

Another qualification for public speaking and one that added immeasurably to Marshall's reputation was brilliant swiftness in repartee and the happy knack of coining a phrase that was quite liable to be quoted by the newspaper press as an epigram and to pass from lip to lip around the town for many days subsequent to its utterance. For example, on one occasion he was heckled on the platform by an elector notoriously interested in wild-cat speculation in oil lands. "Will your candidate support legislation for oil-drilling by the state?" asked the individual, Dennis Murphy by name, supplementing his question by the breezy and unconventional remark that it would be a "devil of a fine thing for Arizona." "Perhaps it might, Mr. Murphy," replied Marshall suavely, "but allow me to remind you that there is a devil of a distance between a derrick and a dividend." The audience roared with laughter, which was echoed next day through the state when the quick retort was made a head-liner in nearly every newspaper. And many of his utterances gained similar wide publicity because of their depth of thought, and the truth they embalmed. "An unreasonable hope in politics is better than reasoned out national despair"— such an aphorism of optimism provided food for reflection long after a meeting had dispersed. And there were few of Jim's orations but were similarly gemmed with sayings worth while to be placed in the storehouse of memory.

So it quickly came about that James Marshall found himself in universal demand as a speaker for his party throughout the state. The campaign proceeded strenuously, and Jim, who at the outset had modestly sug-

gested to his friend that perhaps he might have "a little bit of the war-horse in him after all," had soon abundantly proved that he was a fighter through and through, a gifted orator, a leader of men, a power to be reckoned with and relied upon in the hour of emergency.

In due time the county conventions were completed and delegates elected to the great state convention to be held at Phoenix. At this assemblage there were at the outset only two nominations — the one Ledgerwood Collier, the other a well-known party leader who had once before filled the gubernatorial chair. It had been previously agreed that only a two-thirds majority would nominate. The first ballot showed that the votes were almost evenly divided between the contestants.

Then followed one of those obstinate and prolonged tugs-of-war so characteristic of American politics. Neither side would yield an inch. Ballot after ballot was taken — adjournment after adjournment was made, only for the convention, on its re-assembling, to reballot in stubborn fashion and with the result still unchanged. This deadlock continued for three whole days. No breach in the ranks of either faction was visible — the chance of effecting such a breach appeared to be hopeless. Not even physical exhaustion could weaken the dogged resolve to make no surrender in this hotly contested political fight.

It was the third night of the convention, and the hour was late — close upon eleven o'clock. Both contestants had retired to their homes, worn-out with the ceaseless button-holing, the attacks and counter-attacks,

the prolonged and heated arguments which each time proved so utterly unprofitable as regards actual results. If the truth were to be confessed, the two rivals, although stalwart party men, were about tired of the whole business and ready, by individual sacrifice for the benefit of the party, to accept any suggestion that might bring the deadlock to an end. And a dark horse candidate began to be whispered about the corridors as perhaps the only solution possible.

The chairman was about to accept a motion of adjournment to the following day when suddenly a close friend of Collier's opponent claimed the attention of the convention. He was one of the most noted men in the state, an excellent speaker, a citizen of unimpeachable reputation and wide influence. So he had no difficulty in holding the meeting in a perfect calm when, by way of introduction, he eloquently lauded the principle of party loyalty and unity. But, he went on, there were occasions when, in the interest of the party, all personal considerations must be waived and the spirit of compromise be manifested. After briefly reviewing the splendid attributes of the two candidates — his own particular friend, the former Governor, and the Hon. Ledgerwood Collier — he moved that some third individual be nominated, some one not so closely identified with party fighting and therefore likely to be acceptable to both rival groups of delegates and also to the electors of the state as a whole. In this way, he suggested, Arizona would secure a governor acceptable to all its citizens, and within the party itself political asperities would be softened, political wounds healed, during his tenure of office.

This able address had been received with much cheering, showing that ground had at least been broken for a solution of the difficulty. But before the motion could be seconded James Marshall sprang to his feet. He climbed on top of his chair so that he might be better seen and, when the time came, better heard. For a moment he stood with squared shoulders and arms resolutely folded across his breast. His seat happened to be right in the centre of the hall, and all eyes were quickly turned in his direction. His popularity and his commanding presence united to secure for him instant and respectful attention.

He began with a slow, plain, straightforward summary of the issues that had resulted in this bitter contest. The speaker's enunciation was clear and distinct — the voice at first calm but gradually rising as statement changed to appeal. And soon Jim's soul was afire, and he blazed forth with an intensity and argumentative forcefulness that swept everything before him. The audience hung upon his every word, and at the close rose in a body to shout their approval.

The message of James Marshall had been to point out the unfairness of permitting anyone to withdraw the name of Ledgerwood Collier in his absence, even though the supporters of the other candidate might indicate their readiness to capitulate on the terms that had been suggested.

"No, no, no," Marshall had emphatically declared, "a man who has stood in the front of Arizona development, has borne the brunt of Arizona politics, for more than twenty-five years, such a man should not be deserted during his absence. He should be here to

take part in the deliberations with a chance to fight to the finish, fairly and in the open, as you all know Ledgerwood Collier has always fought. The silvered locks of the veteran have been silvered in the cause of Arizona's progress, in the cause of your political faith, and it would be but a small tribute of the convention's esteem to postpone the question that has now been raised and adjourn until the morning."

As the original motion had not had time to find a seconder, James Marshall's amendment, seconded by a dozen voices, became the only resolution before the meeting. The chairman promptly asked for a rising vote, and soon after declared the motion for adjournment carried unanimously.

Next morning the leading newspaper of the city devoted all its energies toward finding a way out of the deadlock. The entire front page was occupied with an article that pronounced the nomination of either Ledgerwood Collier or his opponent to be now a proved impossibility. In the interests both of the party and of the state, some third candidate must be found. Then, after a reference to James Marshall's splendid speech on the preceding night, it went on boldly to pronounce that "he and no other was the obvious man of the hour, the man unfettered by faction bonds, comparatively a new-comer to Arizona but all the more acceptable in the emergency that had arisen precisely because of this fact, a man of successful achievement, of proved ability, of highest honor, in brief a man who would be an ornament to the state and the ideal leader to guide its destinies to still more glorious achievements." And this fervid recommen-

dation was emphasized by a picture of James Marshall right in the centre of the page.

On reading the article Jim was almost prostrated from shame and chagrin. What else could Ledgerwood Collier think but that this was an act of treachery and ingratitude perpetrated by the friend and partner in whom he had reposed such full and implicit trust? Although the hour was still very early, Jim hurried away to the Collier home.

He found the candidate for nomination on the veranda, placidly reading the newspaper and sipping a cup of coffee at the same time. Collier rose and, laughingly throwing down the paper, held out his hand.

But before taking it Jim poured forth his assurances that he had done nothing to inspire such an editorial, that he had been simply astounded when he had read it, that he would never be a candidate and would refuse the nomination were it tendered to him.

Ledgerwood patted Jim gently on the shoulder.

"You don't need to tell me one word of all this, my dear fellow. You are still a greenhorn in the political game. Just sit down here, and let me pour you a cup of coffee. But right now I want to impress on you not to go on record with anybody except myself in regard to your declining a nomination. I have an idea of my own for winning the fight, and said idea you will see in due time is as full of good politics as an egg is full of meat. You just wait, Jim, old boy, until we reassemble at ten o'clock in convention. We'll be there on time, and whatever I say you must acquiesce in to the limit — keep that in mind. No bolting or taking the bit in your teeth at the end of the game. Now I

think breakfast will be ready in the dining-room. Come along. All your perturbation will vanish in the presence of Mrs. Collier and a good beefsteak."

Jim accepted the invitation, thankful to be so completely exonerated from blame, yet still unhappy and disturbed over the situation that had so unexpectedly developed. Collier delayed their departure until within a few minutes of ten.

On reaching the place of convention they went straight to their appointed places in the centre of the hall. Every seat was occupied, and the galleries were crowded with spectators, among whom the fair sex predominated. Without loss of time the proceedings were formally opened, and the first man to rise and push his way toward the rostrum was Ledgerwood Collier. The old political gladiator, as he faced the assemblage, received a great ovation, all the delegates rising to their feet and cheering, while handkerchiefs were waved broadcast over the galleries.

When order was at last restored, Collier spoke. He opened with a generous tribute to the sterling worth of his adversary, referred to the obviously inspired appeal for a compromise put forth on the previous evening, and then, raising his voice, swept on with growing eloquence:

"Gentlemen of the Convention, responding to that appeal from my opponent's side, I shall now proceed to give you a name — a name wreathed around with the motto of his life since I first knew him —'Success.' I shall give you the name of a man whose nomination by you today for the governorship of the great state of Arizona will in the ripeness of time redound to

your honor as delegates from the counties which have relied upon the wisdom of your deliberations. I shall give you a name that will not only be accepted in the heat and enthusiasm of this convention, but one that will grow in public favor with the rising and setting of every sun between now and the cool of November's election. I shall give you the name of a man who, if selected for the high position of governor by this intelligent body of delegates, will secure to each of you from your constituency a verdict of 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.' I shall give you a name that will shed lustre on our beloved state. Gentlemen of the Convention, I have a name to propose — the name of an Arizonan richly endowed with all the necessary qualifications of a good governor and a great governor. I therefore, in behalf of my party, do place in nomination for governor of the state of Arizona, Honorable James Marshall, of Phoenix."

Pandemonium ran wild. Every delegate in the convention was striving to get on his feet to second the motion so eloquently put forward by the Hon. Ledgerwood Collier, and a few minutes later the chairman declared the unanimous nomination of James Marshall as the standard-bearer of the party.

At the November election following, the Hon. James Marshall was elected governor of the state of Arizona by an overwhelming majority. Little did James Marshall know of the links in his life's history that would be woven in the warp and woof of his destiny between the day of his election and the day of his inauguration. Surely the children of men see through a glass but darkly.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A WOMAN'S INTUITION

SUCH scenes of popular enthusiasm as those attending the inauguration of the new governor, James Marshall, had never before been witnessed in the state capital of Arizona. During the period intervening between his nomination as the standard-bearer of his party and the day of his triumphant election, Jim had come to be known as "the cattlemen's candidate." This had swung to his side thousands of doubtful voters, for in Arizona, as elsewhere, the soil is, after all, the basis of general prosperity, so that the flavor of the soil attaching to a man's personality adds greatly to his chances of success at the polls. By his magnificent record at the Marshall Rancho, just across the state boundary line, Jim had fairly earned the designation of "cattleman's candidate," although he strongly deprecated the additional title of "Cattle King" thrust upon him by hosts of his admirers. However, the brand stuck to him in spite of himself, and cattlemen and cowboys poured into Phoenix for inauguration day, bent on doing honor both to the royally successful cattle-rancher and the acclaimed winner for the highest office which it was in the power of the state to bestow.

This made the parade a most picturesque and inspiring spectacle, for the new governor's automobile

was escorted by many hundreds of cowboys astride their bronchos — horses and riders decked out in all their bravest trappings and finery. From across the river had come a big contingent representing California — the cowboys from the Marshall Rancho loyal to their old employer and proud of his success, together with others from Imperial Valley and cattle districts even further away to which his fame had spread. So what with the whooping and the hurrahing, the jingle of silver-belled harness, the cracking of whips, the flash of gaily colored shirts, the waving of broad-brimmed and sometimes feather-bedecked sombreros, the reception of the Governor as his automobile passed slowly down the crowded thoroughfare leading to the Capitol came to be a veritable ovation.

And there were friends of Jim from afar to whom the reception was specially delightful. From one hotel balcony Francois Lavigne, with his good wife Hortense by his side fluttering her handkerchief, shouted out a " bravo " that instantly drew Jim's attention and elicited a glad responsive wave of his hand. At another point of vantage the new governor responded to an equally vigorous salute from Banker O'Meara of Yuma, also accompanied by his pretty wife, who daringly sent her congratulations by a dainty kiss wafted from her fingertips. But best of all was the balcony that fronted the law offices of Collier and Marshall: for here the senior partner of the firm, together with his life-partner, had assembled a bevy of their friends, and the party included not only the leaders of Phoenix society but three visitors the sight of whom brought the misty tears to Jim Marshall's eyes.

These visitors were none other than Ned Collier, Bessie, and Miriam. The young lovers had been married at Venice-by-the-Sea some ten days before, and Ned as a close to the honeymoon had brought his bride, also his mother-in-law, to visit the parental home and at the same time do honor on the great occasion to his "dear old chum" of the desert days.

As the Governor motored past he was well-nigh overcome with a flood of emotions. But the cheering and caracoling cowboys around his machine diverted attention and enabled him, as he bent low for a few moments, to regain his composure. He was just conscious of Bessie's bright face and wind-tossed curls as, clinging to Ned's arm wild with excitement over the wonderful spectacle, she too cheered for the new governor and waved her handkerchief in enthusiastic salutation.

The Governor passed, and standing up in his machine so as to glance back, he again surveyed the balcony. Beneath it a drill-squad of Elks in snow-white uniforms, each carrying a tiny national flag on a cane, were now performing a series of evolutions. Bessie was clapping her hands with delight, Miriam was leaning over the rail also deeply interested, but dear old Ned was still wistfully looking after his pal. Their eyes seemed to meet, notwithstanding the distance, and Jim, swinging his hat around his head, sent back a signal of special recognition. For Ned and Bessie had only arrived by the morning train, and as yet there had been no personal contact with the Governor.

All the newspapers next day declared that the parade had been "the greatest ever," and the subsequent in-

augural address pronounced by Governor James Marshall the grandest oration yet heard in Arizona.

That afternoon Jim entered into occupation of the gubernatorial mansion. There was a formal reception attended by everybody who was anybody. The new governor stood in the spacious drawing room, shaking hands with all his visitors as they passed before him in line, thanking his many friends for their congratulations, welcoming the strangers within the city gates, diffusing everywhere the kindness and geniality of his presence.

At last it was Ned's turn.

"Jim, old boy"— then he faltered. "Excuse me, Mr. Governor"— again he hesitated, then laughingly asked: "How the dickens am I to address you?"

"You were right the first time," replied the Governor, as he wrung the young fellow's hand. "Just Jim and Ned — always the same — chums as at Submarine."

The line behind was gently pressing on.

"Then, Jim, it is my joy to present to you my wife. Bessie — my letters from away back have told you all about her."

"I seem to know you already very well, Mrs. Ned Collier," observed the Governor, as, beaming down on the bride, he pressed her hand, retaining it in his own for a few moments longer than etiquette might have demanded.

Bessie was blushing a little as she shyly glanced up into the great man's eyes. Into her own, as she looked into his, came just the faintest trace of puzzled wonderment.

"And my dear, good mother-in-law, Mrs. Marsh Gordon." Ned was making the next introduction, so Bessie moved aside.

"Delighted to meet you, Mrs. Gordon," said the Governor with courteous cordiality. "Ned has often written about you, too." Then he turned to Ned. "Tonight there is an official banquet, tomorrow an accumulation of business that must be attended to, but on an early day I'll arrange that we get together. Your father tells me you are to be in Phoenix for a couple of weeks. So you'll hear from me before very long."

The next hand-shakers were now claiming Jim's attention, and the party of three withdrew, to follow the example of those in the throng who had preceded them by going the round of the big public rooms, admiring the pictures and the sumptuous furnishings.

Two days later there was a society picnic at the Roosevelt Dam to which the whole Collier house party had been invited. A long line of automobiles had departed early in the morning, Miriam accompanying her hosts. But Bessie, whose mood ever since the Governor's official reception had been somewhat distrait and pensive, had excused herself on the plea of a headache, and Ned, of course, had remained at home to keep her company.

"Feeling better now, sweetheart?" he asked during the course of the afternoon as he joined her on the veranda.

"Oh, I'm all right," she answered, raising her lips for a kiss. "But somehow, Ned, I have had a presentiment that Governor Marshall is going to send us

his promised message today. It would be too bad to miss him if he sent or came, now, wouldn't it?"

Ned laughed gaily.

"So yours was only a diplomatic headache, Bessie? You little schemer! Who would have thought it? Playing politics already, by jingo! I suppose it's in the atmosphere of dear old dad's home."

He paused — his eyes had wandered down the tree-shaded avenue. A big automobile was turning in from the thoroughfare. Ned resumed in great excitement:

"But I'll be jiggered if you haven't guessed right after all, little woman. Here comes Jim."

And he ran down the steps to open the door of the Governor's car and bid him an enthusiastic welcome.

"Glad to see you, old boy. It's mighty good of you to pay such small fry as we are a call. The Governor, my dear," he went on as, having ascended again to the portico, he presented the distinguished visitor to his wife. "But I'm awfully sorry dad and both the mamas are not at home; they're off to the fiesta at the Roosevelt Dam."

"I count myself fortunate in finding you two young people here," replied the Governor. "I came more especially to pay my respects to the young bride, but I want also to invite you all to visit me at my home tomorrow afternoon. Home's a funny name to call it, Ned. A mansion, but pretty lonely, old man, as compared with the shack we used to share at Submarine."

"Those were days, weren't they, Jim?" responded Ned, his face aglow. "The best days I ever had in all my life."

"Except the present ones," corrected the Governor, with a benign smile in Bessie's direction.

"Sure, sure," said Ned, as he placed a loving arm around his young wife's shoulders and drew her fondly to him. "The best little girl in all the world, Jim, as I knew that very day I cut her picture out of the newspaper — you remember. I've got it yet; we've mounted it on cardboard, and I still use it as a bookmarker."

Bessie blushingly protested.

"No tales, please, out of school."

But Ned audaciously kissed her.

"Oh, there will never be any secrets between us and dear old Jim."

"Well, you have never even yet asked 'dear old Jim' to sit down," laughed the Governor.

"Oh, excuse me," Ned hastened to apologize, as he placed a big comfortable chair in keeping with the visitor's dignified proportions. "And now let us take the chance, dear old boy, of really congratulating you on your election. I am quite aware my dad wanted to be governor. But it was not on the cards. And I know he is sincerely rejoiced that it was on you the final choice fell."

"It was he who nominated me," remarked Jim.

"Yes, with his whole heart and soul in the nomination — and that's a mighty different thing from a perfunctory service to cover one's own defeat. Isn't that so, Jim? And he is proud today to have chosen the right man. Not that he ever worried about that. 'An eagle's egg produces an eagle, no difference where it's hatched.' You were new to Arizona, Jim, as com-

pared with dad. But Arizona has got its eagle all right. Gee! I was never so happy in all my life as when I read the news of your election."

Jim looked pleased.

"You were always an enthusiast, Ned," he commented with a gentle smile of approval.

"Well, who could be anything else but an enthusiast when you are concerned?" was the rejoinder, as Ned leaned over the chair, placing a hand on each of his friend's shoulders. "But my word, Jim, since I last saw you you've grown to be a mighty big man, both in weight and in fame. How many pounds now, old chap?"

"Just over two hundred," replied the Governor. "I stepped on the scales the day after election."

"Gee! and I remember when you blew into Submarine you weren't one half that weight — ninety pounds, if I remember right — ninety pounds of skin and bone, as you used to put it."

Ned, standing now by the side of the chair, was looking down on his friend, and Jim was gazing up at the young fellow's animated face with an expression of ineffable love upon his own.

Bessie, apart and for the moment unnoticed, was listening to every word and gazing with round-eyed wonder. At the reference to "ninety pounds of skin and bone," she pressed her hands against her bosom and with difficulty restrained an ejaculation of surprise.

"And you've grown a bit, too, since those days, old man," remarked the Governor, as he gently stroked Ned's hand resting on one arm of the chair.

The eyes — the voice — the wonderfully sweet smile! This gesture was just the final completing touch for Bessie. How often had he not caressed her own hand in just the same way in the old childhood days?

She no longer tried to restrain herself, but rushed forward with arms extended, her lips quivering, great tears of joy brimming in her eyes.

"I know who you are. You are my daddy — my dear, long-lost daddy."

And needing no confirmation of her words she flung her arms around Jim's neck, nestled down like a child upon his knee, and, sobbing convulsively, clinging to him with all the fervid passion of her love and devotion, buried her face in his breast. James Marshall just patted his little girl's head affectionately. Was any other answer required?

It was Ned's turn now to be overwhelmed with amazement. The Governor's eyes were again raised to his.

"What does it all mean?" exclaimed Ned. "You her papa — her real papa — *you,* Jim?"

"Her papa, Ned. She is my own little darling Bessie."

Ned grabbed his hand. Bessie partly disentangled herself, and raising her radiant, although tear-stained face, kissed Jim fairly on the lips again and again.

"Daddy — oh, my dear, dear daddy," she kept murmuring.

"Then, great guns," exclaimed Ned, still wringing Jim's hand held in both his own, "you are my own dear dad, too. Think of it, Jim, I'm your son, old

pal "— as he spoke he disengaged one of his hands and laid it fondly and proudly on Bessie's curly head.

"The son of my heart from the day we met," replied Jim, as he responded to Ned's fervent handgrip. The tears were now in his own eyes; his young chum also was profoundly stirred.

Suddenly Bessie sat up, although she still kept her place on her father's knee. She drew the little gun-metal watch from her belt.

"And look, daddy dear, look. I have worn your little watch ever since they sent it home, just out of love for you. Night and day I have listened to its ticking, like this "— she placed the case against her dainty pink ear —" and it always kept saying: 'I love my Bessie; I love my little Bessie,' just as you used to say when I was a bit of a girl and we would be walking home together hand in hand along the seashore at Venice. And often, often, when I listened to the tick, ticking, I seemed to be hearing your own voice, and could not believe that you were dead and gone. Oh, how I have prayed that God would send you back again. And now my prayer is answered, my dear, dear daddy."

Once more she kissed him.

"But how did you recognize me, Bessie? I am changed from those old days — of skin and bone."

"The thought came to me the very first time I saw you close — at your reception in the governor's mansion. When you shook my hand and smiled down on me, I whispered to myself: 'How like my dear papa.' And your voice, too, struck some responsive chord within my heart, as you said very softly: 'I

seem to know you already very well.' Oh, you see I remember your words exactly. I've been thinking, thinking ever since. That's why I didn't go to the picnic today, Ned. I just couldn't join in gaiety with such thoughts in my mind."

"Woman's intuition," murmured Jim, with an upward glance at Ned. "Clever little Bessie," he added, fondling the girl's tresses.

She was smiling now — she had dashed away her tears.

"Not much cleverness needed when you and Ned began speaking about ninety pounds of skin and bone blowing into Submarine Junction."

"Gee! that's what gave the whole show away," Ned murmured, bestowing a nod and a grin on Jim.

"But, is it not wonderful?" Bessie arose and drew her father by both hands from his chair. "What a change! What a marvelous cure! And you so big and handsome now. My word, but I'm proud of my daddy!"

"The Governor of Arizona," interjected Ned.

"I would be just as proud of him if he were only a poor shoe-pegger still. I always loved him for his own dear self. You know that, daddy dear."

She reached up her arms to him. Jim stooped and folded her again to his breast.

"I know it, my little darling. God bless you, Bessie dear."

With the tender memories evoked her voice again came brokenly.

"You remember that day in your workshop — the day I told you what I had said to Bernice when she

scolded me for tagging after Burn — that she could just have her Burn for a sweetheart so long as I had my daddy for mine."

"I remember," murmured Jim.

"Well, I've got my dear old sweetheart back again," cried Bessie, hugging him tight. "I've two sweethearts now," she went on, as she extended an arm and drew Ned into the triple embrace.

"My word, was there ever such a lucky girl?"

"Or such a lucky hubby," said Ned, looking from Bessie's happy, flushed face straight into Jim's eyes.

"Or such a lucky daddy," echoed the Governor, as he gathered them both to his heart.

CHAPTER XXXV

NED'S PROMOTION

FOR an hour or more the three continued to chat on the veranda. Bessie listened, with tears often in her eyes, to the pathetic incidents that at the outset had befallen the homeless vagrant — the robbery by the hobo road-agents, the first kindness conferred by O'Meara, the generous hospitality extended by Ned at Submarine. Then came the wonderful story of restoration to health, the lonely years on the desert, the friendship with Francois Lavigne, the sale of the homestead acres, the transformation wrought on the Reilly-Burke cattle ranch, the final muster of Jim's stock and the king's ransom he received for his land and herds.

At the close of the narrative, Ned expressed wonder why Jim had persisted in concealing his identity all those years. But Bessie had understood it all from the first — she held her father's hand, and pressed it lovingly from time to time, while he explained how he had deliberately resolved to cut loose from the daily grind of slavery and try first to regain his health and then to achieve something worth while in the world.

"I gave myself ten years for the ordeal, Ned. But don't think I deserted my family. I took my own way, Bessie dear, to make sure that you were at least provided for in the little home at Venice."

Bessie's eyes opened wide with dawning comprehension.

"Now I begin to understand about those mysterious letters which mother used to get — regularly, at the beginning of every month. She was always on the outlook for the mail-carrier. She would never let me read one of them."

"There was nothing to read, dear," said Jim. "Your mother never knew whence the money came. She does not know even now. But that reminds me. Not one word about all this to her, for the present. I want to break the news to your dear mama in my own way. I know it is a hard task I am going to impose on you. But I beg for absolute silence on both your parts until I speak the word releasing you from this pledge. You promise?"

"Sure," exclaimed Ned, decisively.

"But, oh, how shall I be able to restrain my joy and excitement?" murmured Bessie.

"For papa's sake, you will," replied Jim, taking her hand. "I have an important reason for asking this favor. So be good, little girl, and try and not look too happy tonight."

"We'll go to a picture show, Ned," declared Bessie brightly, "and we'll play hookey all tomorrow morning till it's time to pay our afternoon visit to the Governor."

"Capital, capital," laughed her father. "And now I'm going to take the chance, while we three are still alone, of mentioning some other matters — also in confidence for the immediate present, remember."

"Fire away," replied Ned. "Both Bessie and

I are dyed-in-the-wool conspirators by this time."

"I need not tell you that I did my best to correct a lot of newspaper nonsense about my having cleaned up a million dollars or more from the sale of the Marshall Rancho. But you see, even at the figures I have just given you, I'm a rich man now all right. And I need not say that my children will be rich, too, when the time comes for me to pass on."

"Now we're not going in for any doleful stuff of this kind, old pal," protested Ned. "You're not going to pass on for many, many long years. And Burn Hopkins — who, by the way, Jim, is a mighty good fellow, and bright as a new minted twenty-dollar gold piece as well — Burn and I are going to carve out fortunes for ourselves. Just you make no mistake about that, my long-lost dad."

"I'm sure of it," replied Jim, with a happy smile. "Don't for a moment imagine that I want either of you to quit working, or to give up your ambitions, your ideals, everything that makes life really worth while. And this is just one of the things I was coming to, Ned. But first of all I want to give you a few words of sound advice, my son. Money is power — in the right hands a tremendous power for the benefit of all around. Until a man attains to wealth, or at least a competency, he cannot discharge in full measure his usefulness to humanity. And let me tell you, from the fruits of my own hard experiences, that it is the earning of the first few thousand dollars that is the most difficult part of the task. Money makes money — with a good bank balance as a start, only common sense, a level head, and a steady hand are required for

the accumulation of a fortune. That I have learned. But a man has got to have the first small capital, Ned, or a potential millionaire may remain an enslaved shoe-pegger all his days."

"Poor daddy," murmured Bessie, sympathetically touching his hand. "Don't I remember how hard you worked and never got out of toil and worry —"

"Until I ran away from home," interrupted Jim, with a laugh, "just as if I had been an adventurous boy. Well, I learned my lesson late, but I have learned it well. And I want to save you children the tough experiences of my early married days."

"Oh, we're just going to take our experiences as they come," replied Ned. "I begin to see what you are driving at, old boy. But Bessie and I need no helping hand — we wouldn't miss the fun of making good for all the world. Isn't that so, little girl?"

Bessie nodded a bright assent.

"I am merely trying, Ned, to overcome your absurd sensitiveness about taking possession of what is rightfully yours," explained Jim.

"I have always been jolly careful to look after Number One," grinned Ned. "Not to my knowledge have I ever left anything lying around that was properly mine to stick in my pocket."

"Then you will no longer refuse to take over the $16,000 that belongs to you as your share of the Submarine homestead?"

"Oh, we're not going to return to that ancient question, Jim. It was settled long ago. Against the law, old top — right there is the end to all possible argument."

"But there is a moral obligation which cannot be against the law," persisted Jim. "That money is lying to your credit today at O'Meara's bank in Yuma. At five per cent interest for six years, your capital now amounts to over $20,000. That is the nest egg, my dear fellow, rightfully your own, that will start you and Bessie prosperously and without anxiety, on your long years of married happiness. Shall I make out the check for you now?"

"Nothing doing," answered Ned. But the words sounded ungracious even to his ears, for he quickly added: "Though I thank you, Jim, a thousand times. Don't I know your generous heart, dear old pal?"

Jim glanced at his daughter.

"Perhaps our little girl here will be more sensible? Since you are so very independent, Ned, I must appeal to Bessie to relieve me of this obligation."

There was pleading in his eyes — dumb earnest pleading which Bessie read instantly. A gift or a right, in either case refusal would cause him deepest pain.

"I won't refuse the check, daddy dear," she exclaimed, with a happy smile. "Just make it out in my favor. I'll be the sensible one in our little family of two. It doesn't matter how this windfall comes. It comes from you, and that's enough for me; for the money counts for little as compared with the deep fond love which I know accompanies it."

She rose and kissed her father on the brow.

"You have read my heart like a book, Bessie dear," he murmured gratefully.

Ned had tilted back his chair, and was surveying the

rose vines drooping from the edge of the veranda roof. Bessie had settled the matter on her own responsibility; it was not for him to interfere between father and daughter; besides he had been long enough married now — almost two weeks! — to make twenty thousand dollars in the bank look pretty good to his eyes.

Bessie had drawn her chair close to her papa's. Her pretty face now wore a captivating look of seriousness and practicality.

"And we haven't told you yet about our moving to San Francisco," she said. "That's going to cost money anyhow."

"Ah, on your way toward the President's chair, Ned?" smiled the Governor. "A further step in promotion, eh?"

"And a big raise in his salary," interjected Bessie, with a proud glance at her young husband. "I always told mama that Ned was a sure winner."

Ned's eyes had come down from the roses.

"Yes, Jim," he replied, "everything happened at the same time — marriage, vacation, honeymoon, and a step up into the head office where I always wanted to belong. Would you believe it, I've never had a full week off since I left Submarine?" He leaned back in his chair, and tucked his thumbs into his waistcoat armholes in his old way of bantering, self-confident audacity. "You see I had made myself so superlatively indispensable that they couldn't run the show in my absence. The Lord above knows how they are getting along without me now."

"Oh, I fancy the railroad will survive, old man.

And perhaps the hour has come when it will have to resign itself to losing your invaluable services altogether."

"What's in the wind now?" asked Ned.

Jim regarded him steadily.

"Just this. You are the one man I absolutely require to fill the post of private secretary to the Governor of Arizona."

"Oh, daddy," exclaimed Bessie, clasping her hands against her bosom, her face shining with happiness. She already divined his plan to bring about a joyful family reunion.

"That's absurd," said Ned decisively.

Jim's face betrayed a twinge of disappointment. The young fellow quickly corrected himself by saying:

"Oh, of course, I mean the remark only to apply to myself, Jim. It is absurd to think that there are not dozens of fellows far more competent to fill such a responsible position than I am."

"But I happen to think differently," rejoined the Governor. "I have certain humanitarian projects in view, ideas which you and I used to discuss for hours at a time in the old Submarine days, and which only now I have the chance to change from theory into practice. Without your help, Ned, I am helpless. I need your quick brains, your skillful handling of people, your sympathetic understanding of what I want, your loyalty all the time, through all the troubles that are certain to beset my path. So you see, Ned, you are really indispensable to me. Say yes, right now, my dear fellow."

Arising, he laid a hand on the other's shoulder, and their eyes met.

"Be my dear good comrade once again," Jim continued to urge in a voice that vibrated with tender attachment.

Ned was overcome. The joy of being appreciated now sang in his heart.

"Well, that certainly puts the proposition in a different light, my dear old Jim. If I can really be of use to you, then both duty and affection point the same way. So there's your answer, Mr. Governor — provided Bessie is pleased to pitch her tent in Phoenix, Arizona," he added laughingly.

"Of course you know I'm going to be wherever you are, Ned. But, oh, won't it just be delightful to be near daddy, too?"

"Then that's settled, Ned," exclaimed Jim, his hand extended, his face beaming with satisfaction. "Shake, old man. We'll fix up all the details tomorrow."

Ned shook his chum's hand to seal the bargain.

"Well, I'm afraid the S. P. will go to the dogs without me," he said with a comical smile. "But we'll have to risk that, Jim. And it will certainly be great working together again, eh, old boy?"

"A thing I have longed for mightily," was the reply. "And now, my dear ones both, I must be going. Remember your promises of silence until I have the chance to reveal myself to your dear mother. Here is the governor's courtesy card for her, Bessie, and say how sorry he was to have missed her today. But tomorrow he hopes to have the pleasure of her company

to afternoon tea. Three o'clock, please. I'll expect you all about that hour."

With a kiss for Bessie and another warm handclasp for his new secretary, the Governor was gone.

CHAPTER XXXVI

"SHE NEVER COULD UNDERSTAND"

NEXT day the Governor was awaiting his guests. He stepped into the hall to greet them, and helped Miriam to take off the light dust cloak she was wearing. She stood before him, splendidly costumed, her dress fitting her fine figure like a glove and displaying its neat, well-rounded proportions to the best advantage. Her face looked up into his — not a wrinkle nor a crow's-foot to mar the smooth pink and white complexion. She was smiling just the same old placid smile of languid courtesy and supreme self-contentment.

"A marvellous woman," reflected Jim, as he took her hand. "Has hardly changed in over twenty years. She certainly seems to have acquired the secret of immortal youth."

He had bowed, and now he spoke aloud.

"I am glad to welcome you to my home, Mrs. Gordon. How do you do, Ned? And I suppose I may be privileged to call you Bessie"— this to the young bride as in turn he took her hand. "You see, Ned in his letters has written so much about you two ladies that you seem to me just like old friends."

Miriam was clinging to his arm as he led the way toward the drawing room. The others stopped for a few moments to admire one of the pictures in the hall.

"What a beautiful home you have, Governor," she said, as she advanced and glanced around. "Everyone in Phoenix is remarking how unfortunate it is that you are alone — that there is no lady to do the honors of the governor's mansion."

She spoke the words with an arch upward glance. He betrayed just the glimmer of a smile.

"Oh, that's what folks are saying, is it? Well, I have sometimes thought so myself."

She gently pressed his arm.

"You see, I am taking the privileges you have accorded me — those of an old friend — in giving you the gossip of the town. But that's what a governor needs, isn't it? — someone to keep him advised of every detail, of every little breath that blows."

"Great guns!" thought Jim, "is she setting her cap at me — or rather at the governor?"

But still he smiled.

"Well, Mrs. Gordon, who says but that this lamentable condition of things might be altered? Now, how would you like to be the lady of such a mansion as this?"

Miriam's heart jumped under her well-fitting corsage.

"Oh, Governor," she replied, coyly drooping her eyelashes, "you could hardly expect me to answer such a question." Then she looked up again. "But, frankly, you have a beautiful home, a splendid position, a brilliant future, and every sensible woman, every woman of the thinking world to which I claim to belong, would say that there should be a Mrs. Marshall to share the responsibilities."

"And the honors," drily added the Governor, as he settled her in a comfortable chair.

"Oh, the honors are merely a part of the responsibilities," rejoined Miriam with another fetching smile.

In one corner of the room was a low rattan table, with the tea things all ready set but meanwhile covered with a loose piece of pink gauze. The host, however, had chosen for the present the centre of the room. He was now arranging a cosy little chair for Bessie, who had just come into the room.

"There, my dear," said the Governor, as she took the place he assigned. "Come along, Ned; sit down. This is to be a preliminary get-together talk." And pulling forward a fourth chair he closed the circle.

"I think Mrs. Gordon should first hear the news about the Governor's new secretary," he resumed. "Ned and I threshed out all the details this morning."

"Whatever do you mean?" asked Miriam in great bewilderment.

"That I have resigned from the railroad, mother," interposed Ned with amusing grandiloquence, "and remain in Phoenix as private secretary to His Excellency the Governor."

"Without consulting me?"

Both Ned and Jim laughed in spite of themselves.

"Oh, come now, that was hardly necessary," the son-in-law said, patting her hand good-naturedly.

Bessie was sitting in demure silence. Miriam turned to her.

"Does not this come to you as a surprise, Bessie?"

"Oh, no, mama dear. I told you ever so long ago

that I was always going to stand by my Ned — and stand up for him, too, if he ever needs it. If he is going to be the secretary of the governor, why, of course, I am going to be the governor's secretary's wife. Sounds like one of those puzzle sentences, doesn't it?" she added with a gay smile. "But it's my answer, right enough." And she shot a fond, proud glance at her husband.

"So I'm to be left all alone in Los Angeles," sighed Miriam, with just a little side glance at the governor.

"Well, mama dear," said Bessie, "we were going in any case to San Francisco. And I don't think Phoenix is a bit further away."

"But I might have followed you to San Francisco, child. There are good society people there, naturally."

The Governor arched his eyebrows.

"And not such bad folks in Arizona, too," he remarked, a trifle crisply. "Kind folks, at all events, Mrs. Gordon. And kind folks count for more in life than society folks. Don't you really think so?"

"I don't know about that," replied Miriam, as she daintily rearranged the folds of her skirt. "I have always loved refinement."

Bessie looked at her mother in some dismay.

"Oh, mama is just talking, Mr. Marshall. Whenever she comes to Phoenix Ned and I will make her very happy here. She'll soon be teaching the whole town to go in for woman suffrage and china painting."

At this sally all four laughed perforce, and Miriam had the chance to recover the false step she had made.

"Oh, of course," she observed with her sweetest

smile, "Phoenix is no doubt a very delightful place, with very interesting and delightful people. When does Ned take up his new appointment?"

"Tomorrow morning," said the Governor. "I have already reserved one wing of this house for the youthful couple."

Was it a shade of jealousy that momentarily darkened Miriam's brow? But the others were not looking at her just at the moment. Bessie was clapping her hands with delight as she gazed at the Governor and exclaimed:

"Stay right here with you, dear da — dear Mr. Marshall."

She had fumbled the name, had almost called him "daddy," and for a moment was fairly flustered by the narrow escape. But Miriam had noticed nothing beyond the over-eager joy of voice and look.

"Bessie — don't behave like a mere child," she said, reprovingly.

The mere child promptly subsided, drawing a deep breath of relief. At all events she had not broken her solemn promise to the Governor.

But the latter was going to take no more chances.

"Perhaps you young people," he said, "would like to look over my beautiful gardens — you'll find all sorts of rare shrubs and plants there, Ned."

Bessie rose with prompt alacrity. It was Miriam's turn now to be agitated. Obviously the great man was arranging a tête-à-tête with herself. She was smiling now, approvingly.

"Well, don't rumple up your frock, child."

Bessie was glad to escape. In her father's presence

the restraint of the morning, so foreign to her frank, happy disposition, was now doubly intolerable. She felt sure she would make another slip ere very long — even now she felt like hugging her husband's new employer. So she fairly bounded from the room.

Ned followed, after bestowing a nod of intelligence on Jim, as much as to say, "Now you'll get it over, old chap."

"I don't know what has come over my daughter today, Mr. Marshall," remarked Miriam, apologetically. "Please don't think her a regular tom-boy. She has been too carefully brought up for that."

"No apology needed, my dear Mrs. Gordon," replied the Governor, with a genial smile. "Well, I was going now to talk a little about yourself. Would you, too, like to come to Phoenix?"

Again Miriam's heart leapt. Was he going to propose to her? Surely impossible, after such a brief acquaintance. Yet she swiftly reflected — Ned had written all those letters to his chum, real nice letters regarding her as well as Bessie, she could readily believe. No doubt Mr. Marshall knew about her social distinction in Los Angeles and her fame as a porcelain painter. She smiled at him graciously.

"Oh, I think the change might be made a very agreeable one," she replied discreetly, her eyes downcast to the Turkish rug beneath her feet.

So she did not observe the great yearning look of love that had come into the Governor's face. But she was conscious that he had drawn his chair a little nearer to her own. With coyly drooped eyes she was still contemplating the richly colored product of an

Oriental loom. The Governor was silent. But she fancied she could hear him breathing hard, and felt encouraged to proceed:

"It is best for me to be quite candid with you, Mr. Marshall. You should know that my first marriage was a very unfortunate and unhappy one. My husband did not belong to my social set. His people were not my people — mere farmer folk, able to think or talk about little else than cattle and turnips. I had nothing in common with them, so kept myself aloof. Nor were his friends my friends — I would not even tolerate them in my house. For I was the only daughter of a rich banker in Creston, Iowa, and had always been accustomed to the most refined society."

The Governor was now sitting bolt-upright. All the joy and softness had departed from his countenance. He looked as if he had been smitten between the eyes by a physical blow. His lips were tightly closed, his hands nervously clenched.

But the toe of one of Miriam's dainty shoes was toying with the fringe of the rug. She saw nothing of the change her words had wrought upon the listener, and with a little sigh of self-condolence went on with her tale of woe:

"My husband had prospects, perhaps, of advancement when I married him. But he had no soul, no ambition for higher things, and could never rise above the position of a shoe-clerk — indeed he relapsed even from that, and became a common shoe-pegger."

To cover the humiliation of this painful confession, Miriam dabbed her eyes with a tiny lace handkerchief. At last she ventured to look up. The Governor was

listening — gravely as was quite natural, but not unkindly she thought.

The worst was over now. These were the things that he would undoubtedly come to hear about her if they were not known to him already from Ned. She ventured now to smile through the tears she had siphoned to her assistance — wistfully, resignedly.

The Governor did not seek to interrupt her story.

"So you see it was all very miserable for me," she continued. "And to crown everything, my husband" — she did not even call him her "poor husband," the listener noted —" developed lung trouble. So the burden of carrying on the home fell upon my poor shoulders,"— the conventional adjective of commiseration came here all right —" the responsibility of bringing up and educating my children. This was my one consolation," she went on, brightly now and with a brave attempt at a cheerful smile. "For however unfortunate was my marriage, I must allow that it gave me two very beautiful and charming daughters. Bernice is even prettier than Bessie, as you'll agree with me when you see her. And Bessie is a girl any mother would be proud of. Isn't that so, Mr. Marshall?"

She paused for a reply.

"Undoubtedly," said the Governor, with curt incisiveness.

"Happily I had foreseen the inevitable end and was prepared. I studied china painting at Wellesley."

"At Wellesley? How did you get there?"

"Oh, we sold our little home in Creston, and I had the wisdom to devote some of the proceeds to this purpose. And my art has stood me in good stead since.

Ned has no doubt told you that I have gained considerable fame as a painter on china — and, let me add, earned a comfortable income that has enabled me to give to my dear girls every advantage they could desire."

The Governor rose from his chair. He turned his face aside, so that Miriam did not see the smile of bitter contemptuousness now upon his lips.

"Come this way, please, Mrs. Gordon," he said quietly.

Miriam followed as he stepped over to the tea table, and flung back the pink gauze protecting the dainty little cakes and sandwiches ready for the afternoon refection.

"Do you recognize this china?" asked her host, pointing to the highly decorated teapot.

"Oh, my," exclaimed Miriam in great delight. "The tea-service I painted to fill a special order — and a most generous order, too, let me say." She had picked up one of the delicate teacups, and was examining it. "See, my monogram here on the base — M.G. What a charming surprise! So you were one of my art admirers and patrons?" she asked, with quite a coquettish smile.

"It would seem so. Now kindly come with me. I may have another surprise for you, Mrs. Gordon." He spoke bluntly — almost in a severe commanding tone.

Again she followed as he preceded her out of the room and along a corridor. At the end of this he opened a door by means of a key forming one of a little bunch taken from his trouser pocket.

"My sanctum," he explained, as he threw open the door.

He allowed Miriam to enter first. She uttered an exclamation of amazement. All around her, on mantel, walls, brackets, tables, and pedestals — vases, plaques, bowls and so on — were products of her artistic skill. At the first sweeping survey she could not fail to see that almost every piece of painting to which she had ever touched a brush was here assembled in veritable showroom fashion.

For a moment her heart stood still. She did not know whether to feel crushed or triumphant. Obviously she had had no patron but one. James Marshall had been the rich client who had fallen in love with her art. "Then why not in love with her?" she swiftly reflected. Now she understood this confidential tête-à-tête. Triumph won the day. Her face was radiant as she stood with hands clasped against her bosom, gazing around her, flattered and elated.

"Why, Governor, you astonish me, you really do. So you have been all these years the rich and gifted connoisseur who could appreciate my work? How can I ever thank you sufficiently? Your appreciation! Your liberality!"

"No need for thanks now," replied the Governor, with a saddened smile.

"Did you really take such a fancy to my china painting?" she asked, looking at him coquettishly.

"Well, I was glad that at all events you had a market for your wares."

Miriam was just a little perplexed, a little hurt, at the reply. But she kept on smiling.

"How good of you!" she murmured.

"And does not this tell you anything more?" As he put the question he looked at her squarely, eye to eye.

Again Miriam gave a little gasp of surprise.

"Oh, I begin to see. Perhaps you are also the kind benefactor who sent me those monthly remittances. I am so glad and proud. I always accepted the gifts — for the sake of my children, remember — in the spirit that it was sincere admiration for my art, the wish to help me to further successes, that prompted such noble generosity."

In her fervor of enthusiastic gratitude she would have kissed his hand. But he drew back, and for a moment turned aside.

"You never thought of your husband as the possible benefactor, did you?" he asked, his face still averted, his voice just a little broken.

"How could I? Oh, Ned has told me that you knew what happened to my husband out on the desert. His bones picked by coyotes!" She shuddered as she spoke the last words; the Governor was not looking in her direction, but he could hear the rustle of her gown and her little artificial sigh. "Surely it was best to forget a terrible thing like that — to try to forget him altogether. And really I was glad to banish him entirely from my thoughts."

She touched the listener's arm in gentle pleading for his sympathy. But he shook her hand away.

She was wondering at his seeming discourtesy. Then all at once James Marshall turned round again. On his face was a proud, cold look, but he spoke with

polished courtesy — almost with deference. He glanced at his watch while addressing her.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Gordon, I have an appointment at the State House, and am compelled to terminate our interview."

Miriam tried desperately to hide her disappointment. To part, just at the very moment when she had brought him to the point of a proposal!

"So sorry," she replied, just managing to retain her smile.

"Let me escort you back to the drawing room. I'll send Ned and Bessie to you, and you can have tea, even though I am called away."

"Shall we await your return, Mr. Marshall?" asked Miriam, when they were again standing beside the rattan table with its brave display of hand-painted china.

"I am afraid that will be useless now," he answered, as he turned away and left her.

Once more he had spoken enigmatically, and once more Miriam was inclined to wonder. But when she had dropped into a cushiony chair her complacency soon returned. Not so bad after all for a first interview — such was her musing. The Governor was assuredly interested in her — attracted by her art, obviously smitten, too, with her personal charms. No doubt he had reflected that it would be rather premature, almost in bad taste, to propose to her on the very first occasion of their being alone together. Another opportunity would soon recur. And, leaning back in the luxurious chair, she closed her eyes in dreamy waiting for Bessie's return. The dear child would make

the tea — a cup of tea was just what Miriam required after a crisis so romantic and so full of gilded possibilities.

The wife of a state governor! — in her wildest dreams Miriam had never ventured to indulge so lofty an ambition. But the prize was now within her grasp — might almost be counted as already won! And such a handsome man, too — what a splendid physique — so well preserved! What pride it would be to stand by his side on all state occasions, to play the hostess in his superb official home! At the thought she heaved a contented sigh of blissful anticipation.

As James Marshall passed through the hall and stopped to pick up his hat and cane, he caught a glimpse of his face in the mirror. He seemed to have grown older within the hour. But this very thought caused him to brace himself up and walk proudly erect.

Bessie's quick vision, however, was not to be deceived. She ran to meet him as his tall figure showed above the rose bushes. She saw his worn and haggard look — knew in a moment that something had occurred to cause him distress of mind.

"Why, daddy, what has happened?" Her hands were raised to the lapels of his coat, and her eyes were searching his.

He smiled down upon her bravely — Marsh Gordon's old, sweet, wistful smile.

"Oh, Bessie dear, I have not been able to make your mother comprehend. I release you from your promise, and will leave the task to you, little girl. Go to your mama; she is waiting for you to make the tea.

Ned will follow; I want him to walk a little way with me toward the State House."

Almost before he had finished speaking Bessie had flown. Her husband, strolling along, now came up.

"Ned, old man, just a few words with you. We'll talk while we walk; I'm going over to my office. I shall come straight to the point. It is useless to think that my wife and I can ever live together again. I now know that she does not love me — has never loved me. That ends everything, for to me matrimonial relations without love are repulsive and degrading both to the man and to the woman."

There was a ring in Jim's tense, earnest tones that forbade discussion. Ned could only squeeze his arm in token of understanding and sympathy.

"So, Ned, the best thing for her is to leave Phoenix without delay — tonight if possible. She has chosen her career and made what she counts to be a success. I have made mine and will continue to do my duty to those around me. But our paths henceforth can never meet again. That is certain — positively certain. Now I want you to do one thing, my dear Ned. Please inform Miriam for me that the income from $50,000 United States bonds will be regularly paid to her for life on one condition."

"And this condition?" Ned inquired.

"Is that she leaves the name of Marsh Gordon just as it is today — dead and forgotten. I am now Jim Marshall for all time — the name you gave me, dear old pal. That is the only condition I impose, and I shall rely on you to fix the matter just right. And

if you can get her safely off for Los Angeles by to-night's six o'clock train, I shall be still further your debtor."

"I'll see to everything, Jim. Don't fret, old boy. Everything is always for the best — remember your old philosophy."

"So long then, Ned. I'll expect to hear from you later. Bessie will be waiting for you in the drawing room." With this the Governor strode away.

Meanwhile Bessie had burst in upon her mother. At the sound of the hurried footsteps Miriam started up from her reposeful attitude.

"Ring for the maid, Bessie. We'll have our tea now. Unfortunately the dear Governor has been called away on official business. Too bad. But we are all really quite at home here."

As she spoke Miriam smiled in a complacent manner and glanced around the room with an air of proprietorship. For a moment Bessie stood transfixed with mingled anguish and amazement. Then she darted to her mother and impatiently shook her by the shoulder.

"Good heavens, mama, don't you know who the Governor is? He's our papa. He's my dear, dear daddy."

There were tears in Bessie's voice — tears of joy, and in her eyes the longing hope that the revelation might be joyous, too, for her mother.

But that hope quickly died when she saw the ghastly look of horror and dismay that spread over Miriam's countenance.

"What! What! Your father — Marsh Gordon — my husband?" she fairly shrieked. "And to

think of my confession. It was a lie, a lie, a lie! Oh, Marsh, Marsh, Marsh!"

There was wild, terror-stricken incredulity in the cry. But all the same, full realization of the truth had come to Miriam like a blinding flash. Shame for the words she had spoken, regrets for the chance she had blindly thrown away, simply overwhelmed her. At first into her cheeks had stolen an ashen pallor, but now they turned to crimson and she bowed her head into a bended elbow to hide the tell-tale blushes from her child.

But Bessie had divined the truth.

"I know what you did. You spoke slightingly to him about my daddy. And I warned you, oh, I warned you, mama, never to do that again."

A great sob broke from the girl's throat, and tears gathered in her eyes. Miriam, too, was weeping, and moaning piteously as she wept: "I know — I know it all now. And he tried so hard to open my eyes. But I did not see, I could not see, I would not see. Oh, was there ever a more unfortunate woman?"

At sight of such sorrow poor Bessie was deeply affected. She dropped on her knees, and sought to soothe and console her heart-broken mother.

A few minutes passed. Then Bessie whispered:

"Hush, hush, mama dear. Here comes Ned. I can hear him in the hall."

When Ned entered the room, Miriam was sitting up, tearful but composed.

"Such amazing news," she murmured, as she languidly extended her hand. "I have been quite overcome, naturally. Of course after all these years of

separation certain things are impossible. I could never dream of sacrificing my artistic career."

"Then you are going back to Los Angeles, mother?" asked Ned.

"Assuredly."

"Tonight? The train leaves a few minutes after six."

Was it a mere question or a suggestion? She looked at him curiously.

"Yes, tonight," she promptly decided. "Come along, children. You will help me to get ready for the journey."

Later in the evening, from the tower of the State House, the Governor watched the train pull out. He had already seen Ned on the platform busy over Miriam's hand baggage, and Bessie folded to her mother's breast as they kissed goodby. Then the train was gone. And now the young couple were sauntering away into the falling shadows of the night.

For an hour or more James Marshall lingered in the solitary tower, plunged in deep thought. He watched the moon as it slowly and majestically rose over the rim of distant hills; the great orb was nearly full, and flooded the bowl-like valley beneath his gaze with silvery effulgence. The night wind came up softly from the south, bringing the fragrance of orange blossoms. Everything was very still — from far-away Jim could even hear the lamenting howl of a coyote. He thought of the lame, lone coyote he used to feed near Submarine. It was only pity now that filled his soul as he again murmured the familiar lines:

And it isn't the shame, and it isn't the blame,
That stings like a white-hot brand —
It's coming to know that she never knew why
. . . . . .
And never could understand.

Then, descending the steps, he turned away along the deserted street toward the governor's mansion. The few remaining dead leaves of the shade trees cut the moon's rays on the sidewalk below into figured lace-work. It had come to James Marshall that great sorrows of the heart are not infrequently like wrinkles of pain ironed away by time, and covered over with dead-sea ashes of forgetfulness. His belief was stimulated anew by a knowledge everlasting that "If a man die, yet shall he live again"— live in the immortality of biology — in little children yet unborn.

THE END

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

WERT
BOOKBINDING
Grantville, Pa.
Sept—Oct 1985
We're Quality Bound

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
00015001070